

The
HOUSE
of
DORNELL



FERGUS
GRAHAM



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The House of Dornell

The House of Dornell

Ille terrarum mihi praeter omnes angulus ridet

By

Fergus Graham

Author of

"Kathleen," "Tommy and a Tower"



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The House of Dornell

I

FRIENDSHIPS AND GARDENS

I WONDER if to you the title of this opening chapter seems as appropriate as it does to me? Friendships and gardens. The words belong to one another, and each suggests the other; wherefore I have tried to put down on paper some of the scenes that rise before me when I think of a garden and friends we both have known. Illusive stuff these memories are, illusive as patches of sunlight, and as difficult to capture for the purposes of a tale; still, they are spots of real brightness, and as such worthy to be chronicled, not only for your refreshment and mine, but for the pleasure of those who would with us snatch a few moments from the business of life to walk in green alleys and among

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flowers. We have both been gardeners in our leisure time, and with the plants we tended the little seedling of friendship has grown up and flourished. That is why I have chosen this title for my first page, and because it will appeal to you who always loved a garden, so that while you read, the half-forgotten incidents will come back to you, fresh and distinct, like the fragrance from the flower-beds in July.

I can see you nicely critical as you scan these pages; smiling sometimes at a familiar touch you recognise, or frowning at a trick of memory that has let you forget so much, while I remember. But it was never quite the same for you as it was for me, because you lived these scenes and moved among them as an actor, whereas I came on them from outside. Thus the things you met as every-day occurrences, were to me choice morsels, very gems of happenings.

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Just a few of these impressions I have written about, not selected for any special merit they may possess above others, but rather drawn by chance from the pile that lies within the cupboard of my memory. Some of the papers are a little dusty, perhaps; some of the writing a little dim, but you who shared with me those pleasant days will see no dust nor dimness when you cast your eyes back upon one picture or another, and the colours that a pen cannot make evident will touch them all in the soft light that recollection brings.

You may be critical with justice, seeing the material is so rich in possibilities, and doubtless I have missed the best that might have been recorded. Still, let me remind you again: this is illusive stuff to handle, and atmosphere is hard to reproduce in type. The bottled essence has not the true bouquet of the rose, neither has

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a tale, however subtilely planned, the same flavour as real life. Nevertheless, our imaginations can be caught by both, so that we smell the roses and live ourselves in the tale that is written.

I was reading, the other day, a quaint "Essay on Friendships" (after the manner of Goldsmith) and in it romantic friendships were particularly condemned. The author (whose name I have been unable to discover) had arranged and classified friends, like plants, under different headings, with a description, for the most part damnatory, of each. Thus The Timid Friend, exemplified by one Bill Sensitive, has a good disposition, but is under perpetual alarm lest his benevolence should get him into a scrape. The words "You will oblige me very much," put him immediately into a fever, and "I come to ask your assistance," throws him into

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a perfect agony. The author very rightly observes that such a friend is contemptible and useless. On the other hand, The Red Hot Friend is not a jot more valuable than the last. He is all bluster, but usually cools before he comes to the point, and leaves you in the lurch when you had reason to expect everything of his protestations. But The Romantic Friend is worse than either of these. He is a pleasing companion in the hour of distress, but the consolation he offers is not true. It accords with our errors as it pities our sufferings, and instead of making us sacrifice at the altars of Wisdom and Prudence, leads us into fresh absurdities which the manners of the world will not acknowledge.

There was a time when I myself cherished some liking for the idea of a romantic friendship, but since learning of its snares and pitfalls, I have relinquished

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the desire, and am content to be a friend, without qualification, to those who seek my company. It is true enough that the world will not tolerate romantic friendships. When simple folk become men of the world, the romantic part of their intercourse degenerates into a motley, unintelligible thing that many people call friendship. Therefore, if we wish to enjoy a spice of romance, a flavour of simplicity in our daily intercourse, we must cultivate our friendships in a garden, or in a quiet place where no sacrifices at the altar of Wisdom or Prudence are demanded.

Sentimentalism is, I think, the word we want to banish from our idea of friendship, not romance, and in a garden there is always a strain of the last. We cannot sigh and be sentimental over every flower that withers, or moralise upon the fleeting glories of our tulip borders. There

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are weeds to be pulled and seeds to be sown, and a hundred practical matters to be attended to that will keep our minds healthy and our muscles hard. Romance is quite a different thing. Without romance we should plant in straight rows, and miss the charm of contrast between the brilliant beds and leafy shrubbery walks. Worst of all, we should have no feeling for the past, which is made up of romance in an old garden. The white seat beneath the rose-trellis would not set us dreaming of old fashions, and we should put a carpet bedding of stiff design where the gillyflowers and marigolds now flourish.

We are no sentimentalists, nor are we cynics, though it is a satisfaction sometimes to sneer at the world's conception of a friend. Our own friends, at Dornell, would not suffer us to become cynics, however strongly we were tempted by the

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world, because here, at least, we have an atmosphere of perfect candour and sincerity, which acts as a potent antidote against unwholesome reflections. The mere breath of it keeps our heart fresh. So may it be with this book when our comrades have passed out into the world. Keep it on the shelf at your own particular corner of the fireside, within reach of your hand when the sky seems overcast and the wind blows chilly. Then, at such times, may you find in its pages that which will make you smile, and set you on a pleasant train of memories.

This is no philosophic essay on the benefits of friendship; the state itself is good enough without an appended lecture to enhance the fact, and philosophic ponderings are more suited to the chimney-corner, than to garden walks. I cannot call to mind where our friendship began: in a railway train, on a steamboat, or in a

Friendships and Gardens

garden. It might have been anywhere, and detail is of no account. We were sprawling under trees when first I recognised it, and it will last, mayhap, long after the leaves have fallen before the blast of winter gales. In the meantime it is summer weather, and the fields lie dappled in their gold and green expanses betwixt us and the river. I am back again at Dornell; I can see again the house, and lawns and pine-clad hills; I can smell the sweetness of the flower borders, and hear laughter in the big saloon. Is this sentiment, or romance? A touch of both I fancy, and the one harms not the other in the just proportion of their mingling. But those moral and philosophic reflections rise, even as I greet you smiling. It is the fault of old books that I have been reading, musty old books in which staid folk have written essays (after the manner of Goldsmith) upon friendships. Roman-

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tic friends, I am content that we should remain, and our sacrifice to Wisdom and Prudence shall be an hour or two, and our altar the sun-dial.

So much for your garden and friendship. You are the philosopher, I the idler, and were a sacrifice needed, it surely should come from me. But this book is no burnt offering for atonement, no oblation before Wisdom's altar. It is just a sheaf of memories from a garden dropped, like a handful of flowers, upon your study table.

Philosophic reflections I shall leave to you, then. In your chair before the fire you may philosophise to your heart's content, or fall asleep and drop my volume in the ashes. I only touch these themes with a light pen that goes trippingly, as our child comrades used to go, round about and through *The House of Dornell*. So be not too critical as you read, and

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when you close the book may it be with some regret, and with a feeling that your friend has, in a happy moment, caught the spirit of a place you love.

II

THE HOUSE OF DORNELL

IT is an old-world house on a gentle slope, looking across fields of chequered green to a broad river and low, wooded hills beyond. I can picture it at any season of the year, with always a quaint charm of its own; but I like best to think of it in summer, late summer, when the trees are full of leaf, and the first tints of gold are on the barley fields. It must be evening, too, so that the pines on the high ground toward the west stand out clear against the flamingo tones of the sky, and the cedars on the lawn fling long shadows to touch the old, stone sun-dial. On a summer evening there is a subtle charm about the house, and a warmth of atmosphere that strikes one as pleasant and home-

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like, and to see the place at such a time is like encountering a familiar, human friend, whose greeting bids us welcome. Dornell has nothing vast or stately in its outlines, nothing imposing; it has just a simple dignity of its own that fits old walls and an air of by-gone years. It is one of the world's rare sanctuaries, a bit of the still past left amidst the modern turmoil of factory smoke and clanging engines.

Tall chimneys can be seen from the House of Dornell, trails of smoke above the trees, and at night, the glow of distant furnaces makes lurid blots against the sky. These are evidences of what is; here are the lingering tokens of what was, and the echoes of the present come mellowed across the woods and lawns, a faint hum to mingle with the droning of the bees. The wheels of time are checked within the gates of Dornell, and the feverish haste of living slackens to a gentler pace.

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This is not the world in which we hurry to and fro; this is a world of dreams and sweetness, and of many memories. There are stone steps to the door, grey steps worn by the feet of generations past and gone, and lichen-bound in the crevices between the flags. Along the front of the house are flower-beds, and beyond them a gravel square, bounded by smooth turf. East and west spread shady pleasure-grounds, and to the north the cultivated lands rise to meet a line of purple mountains. So much for the setting.

Inside the house are long, narrow passages, quaint, stone stairs, rooms opening into one another, and the big saloon. The big saloon is my favourite room at Dornell, and it is entered direct from the steps outside. It is a family gathering-place, the centre to which we gravitate at certain hours of the day, a starting-point from which we set forth each morning. I have

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a particular affection for the saloon when we congregate there on an afternoon for tea; when the tall doors are open, and the scent of flowers comes in to mingle with the perfume of dried rose-leaves in the china jars. There is a homely air about the tea-table, which is chiefly due to the presence of a brown teapot that has existed as long as I can remember Dornell. The brown teapot and the cherry jam; both are inseparably connected in my mind with placid afternoons at Dornell, and if the teapot appeals to my graver time of life, it is to be a boy again only to taste that jam!

But the big saloon would lack its special attraction, and Dornell its pleasantest memories, were it not for My Lady. She is the central figure of a group I love to contemplate, the gentle power that makes its influence felt throughout the day, and draws us, a contented circle, round the

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brown teapot when she makes our tea. I always think of My Lady as ministering to somebody, and her ministrations generally take the form of feeding the hungry, because there are three perpetually hungry persons at Dornell: The Baa-lamb, The Beloved and Cynthia; three outwardly angelic forms in constant need of sustenance.

The Baa-lamb, The Beloved and Cynthia. Three yellow heads in a row. Dornell would be something less than it is without you; a little of its charm would be wanting, though your ways are not those in keeping with romance, and the peacefulness of life might drift to insipidity. Those children are the sprites of Dornell, the lively-footed elves that flit through the old, quiet rooms like gleams of sunlight. Their laughter and their mischief run, like ripples upon still water, along the placid surface of our existence.

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I love to be tormented by the children, and they love to torment me, which is the reason why we are such excellent friends. If they ceased to use me as a sort of overgrown toy, I should feel that my popularity was on the wane, and that my position as a favoured one at Dornell was imperilled; on this account I bear much buffeting, and in return have gained three staunch and loyal allies. The friendship of those three, The Baa-lamb, The Beloved and Cynthia, is a possession I am proud of and cling to jealously. It tickles my conceit, too, that they should choose me for a friend, and the honour of being one is worth a few sore ribs. The mystic realm called the child-world is no foreign land to me, because three of my best comrades dwell there, comrades I would not exchange for the dozen wisest heads that ever wagged.

Then as for comfort when the mind is

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troubled, give me a child's sympathy; the sympathy of such a one as you, Cynthia of the golden locks. How often have I seen, in your eyes of most expressive blue, an understanding of that which I have thought to keep hidden within myself. I have caught that look many times when you guessed that I was sad, and I have been grateful, though you did not know it. It is the inestimable gift of woman's sympathy, my dear, that makes you quick to comprehend, and I forgive the bruise you made upon my shins. Only one condition do I exact; that you keep those eyes unchanged for the sorrows of the world in years to come.

Children put me in mind of a garden: they are like the flowers in the garden at Dornell, very bright and full of fragrance, and I love the garden next to them.

It is old-fashioned, sweet and slumberous; a harmony in tones and comely forms,

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a melody set to the music of changing seasons, with the refrain of summer dominant among the notes. Spring with the song of birds and the pink of apple-blossom is a delicate prelude, and as the weeks pass the music swells into a full chorus of delight. What a riot of colour July brings to the long herbaceous plots! How they glow with the splendour of wide open blooms! Delphiniums, blue as the sky, sweet-peas of every shade from crimson to the palest buff; carnations, splashes of the scarlet poppy, the stately purity of the Madonna lily, and—roses. There are roses everywhere. The old moss-rose near the gate, the delicate teas in their own special bed, the yellow briar, and hedges of dark Provence roses that bound the long green walk. This walk bisects the garden, and its formal lines are quaint and rather pleasing, in the midst of the flower-borders and apple-trees

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that hem it in. It imparts a touch of dignity to the garden, and a flavour of primness that seems appropriate in such a place. The grass is always kept well rolled and closely cut, so that there is some suggestion of a bowling-alley, were it not for a stone sun-dial, which destroys the effect while adding a charm of its own to the broad, green stretch of turf. A curved bench, white and formal as one might expect, stands at the top of the walk. It is flanked by two strange box-trees, shaped like birds, and behind it is a trellis up which climb crimson ramblers—crimson ramblers that refuse to be formal, and that drop their clusters of blossom upon the back rails of the curved, white seat.

There is a summer-house at Dornell, but I prefer the white seat in the garden. There is a little Cupid on the summer-house, but I prefer the lily-beds. Lilies

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and roses about the throne of summer, and if Cupid wanders here he keeps himself well hid, pouting for lack of game, while Cynthia and The Baa-lamb race each other round the sun-dial. As for me, I occupy the throne of summer; an autumn leaf blown there by mistake, and I feel both old and withered, till the children, growing tired of racing, come and sit beside me. Then I feel young again.

Cynthia's eyes get dreamy as she looks across the garden, and I should like to compare notes with her on the subject of dreams; but The Baa-lamb will not allow her to stay quiet long. He does something, says something, to waken Cynthia from her pensive mood, and the next instant I am involved in a brawl. Not a serious brawl, but any sort of brawl seems so indecorous on the throne of summer that I take to flight down the long, green walk, followed by the children with shouts

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that wake the sleeping dogs, and bring them from the shade to join in the pursuit. I know I shall shortly have to jump a flower-bed, and most probably spoil the poetry of nature by sitting in a delphinium clump. But what of that? I would rather gambol like a puppy-dog, and fling my heels across the turf than think of autumn and withered leaves in this summer garden at Dornell.

III

CYNTHIA

IF I were writing a novel I should make my heroine like Cynthia; Cynthia grown up as I can picture her. It is a fascinating idea, but all the same, I must confess to preference for my heroine as she is—a little girl of ten. Cynthia herself would scorn the notion of being a heroine, or anything else of a sentimental nature, because her own conceptions of the heroic are those of a school-boy, and her pattern a glorified edition of her brothers. The Baa-lamb and The Beloved show a good-humoured sort of toleration for Cynthia as a girl, and take their own superiority as a matter of course. It has never entered their heads that the humble efforts of a sister may some day cause her to over-

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take them, and pass them on the road they strut along so proudly. Yet, were I asked to name the bravest and the finest of the three, I should without hesitation give the first place to Cynthia. In the matter of moral bravery she outstrips the boys, and physically she is their equal in almost everything. But it is the moral pluck of Cynthia that most appeals to me; I can understand that pride would forbid her to cry out when she is hurt, and fear of ridicule restrain her from the natural howls of pain; but the command she has over her inner feelings when they are touched is always a wonder to me in so small and young a person. I sometimes think it must be the result of long practice, combined with an uncommon gift for self-abnegation, and if that be so, Cynthia is a heroine now, without waiting till she is grown up.

If The Baa-lamb or The Beloved desires

Cynthia

a thing—which they are not allowed to have—we in the house know all about it, and the injustice of denial is noised loudly in the passages. There is a terribly injured expression on The Beloved's face when his will is thwarted, and the haughty aspect of The Baa-lamb fills us with an uncomfortable suspicion that we are in reality cold and cruel criminals. That is the annoying characteristic of both The Baa-lamb and The Beloved. One cannot punish them without feeling that the true criminal is oneself, and the sneaking desire to propitiate takes away all sense of satisfaction in having done one's duty. The only way to recover self-respect is, with set purpose, to commit an act of reprehensible indulgence.

In the case of Cynthia it is different. She says nothing, whatever she may feel, and on this account, so illogical are the laws by which we reason, it is generally

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believed that Cynthia does not care. When she is deeply moved she goes for a walk with the dogs, and I have met her, a pathetic little figure with scratched knees, returning home from such an expedition, and because I know Cynthia I, too, pretend that there is nothing wrong.

Tough little Cynthia with hair the colour of ripe corn. One would never guess how tough she is to look at her, for in repose she is not unlike The Blessed Damozel; a fragile dream-child to be guarded from the rough winds of the world. But her moments of repose are few, and the resemblance passes whenever she begins to move. She becomes a sprite, an elfin thing, all legs and arms; a vivid bit of colour in the sunshine, crowned by a flowing, yellow mane. The poetry of motion is not for Cynthia, no more than is the poetry of romance. She scorns both with all her heart, and prefers to turn somer-

Cynthia

sets, or proceed by leaps and bounds. Her progress through the world has more of the whirlwind than of poetry in it, and those who have only seen her in the restraining garb and atmosphere of ceremony, an ethereal vision, The Blessed Damozel with eyes that seem to look straight out from Heaven, have no notion of the scudding elf, flashing bare knees beneath a kilt, the aurora borealis of her clan. She is a tempestuous person, wild as the heather on the hills, and her knees are generally scratched. Still, I love her, and what is more, she loves me; in a shamefaced sort of way, it is true, but faithfully for all that. We are lovers in a simple, childish sense; lovers in the present, without a future or a past to trouble us. In fact, ours is an ideal state could it only last, and up till now we have no thought of parting. Cynthia is ten, and I—am envious when I watch her turning

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somersets. Cynthia is my sweetheart. I mentioned the fact to Little Cupid on the summer-house; but he was very scornful and turned his back on me. I suppose he thinks it a waste of time, a lamentable waste of time, because to him love is a business and no joke. Our trifling seems ridiculous to him, being all make-belief and play, still to Cynthia and me the arrangement is altogether satisfactory. It gives us a proprietary right in each other, a right to sympathise with one another on various occasions, and if that sympathy is merely expressed in a glance, it still gives us comfortable assurance that each understands the other.

Cupid may look as scornful as he likes. We do not care, and I know it is because he cannot make targets of us for his arrows that the god of love affects disdain. It is not often one can best Little Cupid, or dare to take liberties with him,

Cynthia

and it is only for such a couple as we are to laugh at his arrows. Cynthia and I make a perfect combination of defence against Cupid, and my ally is quite unconscious of the fact. She has no knowledge of Cupid as a god, therefore she is not afraid of him. To her he is simply a little figure on the summer-house, and were he removed from his perch she would not miss him. Never mind, Little Cupid. There are plenty of grown maidens in the world, and men too, glad to offer themselves up for sacrifice. They will tremble and show you proper respect; so be content with them, and do not grudge me Cynthia in the garden at Dornell.

I call her my sweetheart, sometimes, when we are alone. It would not do to let her brothers hear me, because they are incapable of seeing anything but food for mirth in such an idea. They would consider it a prime joke, or be very con-

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temptuous, and in any case they would torment Cynthia till she "went for them," which might spoil the beauty of our fair romance. No, we must keep its glamour untarnished by tears, its silver course unsullied by vulgar brawls. Cynthia has in her a strain of artistic feeling that extends to matters sentimental, and sentiment touches the latent woman in her. It is a new and delicate growth, this budding consciousness of sex, and the feeling that it is weakness to acknowledge it makes her prompt with feet and fists. The boys are her heroes, yet they are boys and brothers. She watches them for the least provocation.

Somebody remarked to me, not long ago, that Cynthia was most kissable. The same person complained subsequently that the child was unresponsive, and indeed Cynthia is woefully unresponsive to those who caress at sight. To the habitual

Cynthia

smiler upon children she appears too sedate for her age; but it is only because her independence and sense of decency are outraged by the caresses of a stranger in public. She also hates being called a little girl, and being asked how she is getting on with her lessons; but she is never rude to guests in the house, only unresponsive. Those who know her best understand that her nature revolts from soft handling, and that after being kissed by her mother's visitors she flies off to be roughly tumbled by those imperfect knights, The Baa-lamb and The Beloved, as a sort of purifying exercise after the restraint of company manners. Nevertheless, there are times when Cynthia is responsive—when she is sure that nobody will laugh—and in gentle mood, she is most captivating. Animals see her in this mood more often than do human beings, and all the dogs about Dornell are

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her devoted slaves. Next to the dogs she favours old men and women, who confide their long lists of ailments to her. The more ailments they possess the more attractive are they to Cynthia, and she is a mine of information on the subject of Rheumatism and its treatment. It would be worth while to be old and infirm, just for the sake of being visited by Cynthia; but I fear those aged ones she goes to see are more interested in the soup she brings than in her. I know they grievously resent her following of dogs. But Cynthia has endless patience and compassion for the sick and sorry of this world, be they men or dogs, and it is in ministering to them that she drops the defensive armour of independence and appears as she is—a sweet and gentle woman, a true-hearted friend, and—a heroine.

Sometimes, of an evening, we wander across the lawn, Cynthia and I, till we find

Cynthia

ourselves in the old garden. There we sit down and dream a while, on the white seat beneath the red rose trellis that stands at the top of the long, green walk. The sun-dial throws a shadow on the grass, the air is very still, and through the trees a line of hills beyond the river shows clear and dark against the evening sky. I wonder what Cynthia is dreaming about? But the dream, whatever it is, comes to an end very soon, for the boys have found us. Cynthia wakes, The Baa-lamb rouses me, and together we wake the echoes as, arms linked and four abreast, we dance our shadows down the long, green walk.

IV

AT BREAK OF DAY

WHEN the morning sun strikes through the window blinds and the fresh sounds of the morning rise from the harvest fields behind the House of Dornell, somewhere about half-past seven, the day begins for me with a descent in force by The Baalamb and The Beloved. Half-asleep, just enough awake to know that I am comfortable, and that laziness is very good, I hear the scampering of bare feet along the passage, and the door opens to admit three visitors. When first I came to Dornell My Lady advised me to lock my bedroom door and take the key inside. I did not understand why, and so neglected her warning; but I have found out since,

At Break of Day

and suffered as those do who insist upon learning from experience. The key is lost now; I think The Baa-lamb has it, but he only smiles when I inquire. Every morning these three visitors arrive; the Baa-lamb, who has nothing lamb-like in his composition, The Beloved, more suitably named and—Don. Two humans and a dog, two cherubs and a flea-bag, two demons and a microbe-trap, according as my mood prompts imagination. But it makes no difference what one calls them; they come just the same, smiling, friendly, merciless. There is no escape, and—well, since I did not secure the key in time, it is entirely my own fault.

The Baa-lamb is a naval officer from Osborne, who writes R.N. after his name, and wears a stripe, indicative of authority, on his right arm, but he is a wicked imp, for all that, worthy of many stripes. How he got the name of Baa-lamb I cannot

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guess, and it is not safe to inquire at this time of the morning, when I can be had so easily at a disadvantage. I feel my unprotected position and huddle beneath the clothes. The Baa-lamb leads the way across the room with a run and a jump that lands him fair on the middle of my chest, from which he bounds off to make way for The Beloved, who is lighter, more gentle by nature, and therefore less painful. It takes them a few moments to settle themselves (I having been settled at the first assault) and then they remember Don, who has no desire to share my bed, but who is dragged up by the scruff of his neck, till he comes to rest upon my midriff as a permanency. Good, faithful Don! His tongue hangs out, and he blinks his eyes close to my face, as though to explain that this is not his fault, and that he would really be far happier on the floor, scratching his ears

At Break of Day

in peace. However, here he is, and The Baa-lamb, and the Beloved. As for me, I am merely a pedestal for Don, a buffer between the fists and feet of his masters.

The Beloved would not hurt a fly. I have been assured that he would not, and I believe it; so it must be because I am not a fly that he takes such pains to find the tenderest places among my ribs. And all the time he looks like an angel, a being of superior clay to ordinary boys, a too-good-to-live type of youthful loveliness that makes one almost sad. He is deceptive. The Baa-lamb looks the part when he lays himself out to compete with imps, but The Beloved contradicts his aspect in a manner that is disappointing. It would be still more disappointing if he lived up to that angelic expression. Yet there is a spice of something, which if not angelic is, at least, uncommonly attractive,

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in The Beloved. Something to which I cannot put a name, something that makes me patient when he prods my ribs. He is one of those I immediately recall when I hear sour persons cry down the race of little boys. If they only knew The Beloved, they might have cause to cry in earnest.

But such persons would probably lock their bedroom door, or put the washstand against it, if The Baa-lamb had stolen the key. They would have an extra hour for slumber, and come down in no better humour than I do, who am waked at seven.

A lull always follows the introductory storm of arrival, and The Baa-lamb rests his elbow on that portion of my chest unoccupied by Don, while The Beloved clasps his hands behind his head, and looks thoughtful. His mind is running on a problem, I know, some knotty point

At Break of Day

that puzzles him, and soon will come a question fit to tax the powers of Miss Edgeworth herself. The Beloved is a child whose thirst for knowledge would have charmed the authoress of "Frank"; but the modern boy has advanced some stages in sophistication since her day, and the replies that satisfied the simple mind of Frank would only cause The Beloved to scoff. I cannot parry the rapier thrusts of his intellect with such phrases as "you are too young to understand," and an evasion would be hailed as a proof of ignorance. The Beloved does not ask questions for the mere sake of causing embarrassment, but I have often longed for the genius of Miss Edgeworth to inspire me with appropriate replies. Given leisure, some paper, and a pen, it might be a simple matter; but to answer The Beloved off-hand, on the spur of the moment when taken unawares, is

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quite a different thing. That is why the sight of our Beloved in a pensive mood fills me with uncomfortable sensations.

Some folk are dexterous in the art of handling platitudes, and nothing is easier than to dispose of a question by means of a sweeping, crushing platitude; but such a method does not always carry conviction to the mind of an inquirer, and it is necessary to convince The Beloved before he is satisfied. And as for crushing him, a moral platitude, however apt, would only make him laugh. I prefer the methods of The Baa-lamb, which dispose of a question more effectually, and have the additional grace of breeziness. There is a tonic flavour in the comment "Rot!" that is altogether missed in the suitable-for-children type of answer. It is sweeping, it is comprehensive, and it leaves no ground for further argument; therefore,

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when The Beloved on his back, a bare foot kicking, utters in his slow, deep voice a devastating inquiry, I am thankful to The Baa-lamb for his crisp retort, and forgive the subsequent campaign across my body.

But the Baa-lamb is not always my ally. Sometimes he joins forces with his brother to rend information from me, and when that happens I am undone. Their questions take one by surprise, and the truth tumbles out before one has time to think, or qualify it. My private affairs I used to regard as my own, matters that concerned myself and nobody else, but since The Baa-lamb and The Beloved took an interest in my well-being, it is surprising how little there is left for them to find out. One question leads to another, and I am not always on the alert, especially in the early morning; still, whatever they find out they keep to themselves, being

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men of honour by instinct, and my friends.

As a sort of return for my confidences, they favour me with scraps of domestic news, which are certainly not intended for my ears, and let me know exactly how I stand in the estimation of the household. There is no idea of flattering me in this, no particular object in thus enlightening me as to the world's opinion of my merits. It is a simple statement of facts that may, or may not, cause me joy. One thing is certain: The Baa-lamb and The Beloved give me credit for being as honourable in respect to secrets as themselves, and this alone is fine and subtle flattery. We meet on an equality when I am down upon my back among the bed-clothes, and as equals we discuss the problems of to-day and yesterday. Any symptoms of superiority on my part, any attempts to play the part of elderly superior, would be out of place

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when Don is on my chest, and would lead to a riot in which I should not gather dignity.

In the early stages of our acquaintance, The Baa-lamb and The Beloved used to beat me with razor-strops, and hide my collar-studs; but that was, as it were, a preliminary test through which I had to pass, before they could accept me as a comrade. The testing process could be best carried out when I was at a disadvantage, unclothed, and in no state to pursue beyond the limits of my bedroom door. That is probably why the Baa-lamb stole my key. Every one who has studied the habits of little boys and girls knows well this preliminary stage of friendship, when the grown-up person is subjected to a rigorous course of buffetings and annoyance, and he will agree with me that the test is a severe one. But a test of worth it is, and a friendship following

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it is a sign that we must have, at least, a few good qualities to recommend us. Children are critical judges; therefore, to be called a friend by them is subtle flattery.

I am proud to think that the Baa-lamb and The Beloved have chosen me as an intimate, and I am content to be reminded of the fact at any hour. Friendship is nothing without its accompaniment of self-sacrifice, and I try to keep this in mind when Don lies heavy on my chest. Don would lie there all day, but even as we talk, a clock strikes, and somebody exclaims, "Just look at the time!" With a bang Don finds himself upon the floor, mingled with The Beloved, and their protests rise in unison, becoming shrill when The Baa-lamb, having stamped on me, descends on them, like a solid kind of cherub, from aloft.

The room seems very quiet now they have gone, and were it not so late I could

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with pleasure snatch an extra wink. But I
am obliged to get up, and long before I am
dressed, The Baa-lamb returns to tell me
I am late for prayers.

V

CAIRNAN

BEHIND the House of Dornell, hidden in a secluded hollow of its own, lies Cairnan's Yard. Cairnan is the electrician, and a good many other things besides, who lives in a highly-charged atmosphere among dynamos and gas-engines. It is surprising how he can remain so placid, one would think that he ought to be in some wise affected by his surroundings, made irritable perhaps, or supercilious; but Cairnan is the most good-natured man I ever met, and the most obliging. Many a wet afternoon have I spent in that wonderful workshop of his, watching The Baa-lamb endangering his life with molten metals, and listening to the even flow of Cairnan's talk. He is a versatile man, a man of many accom-

Cairnan

plishments and many experiences. He has been in the army, navy, merchant service, and wherever he has been he has learned something. The result is that he knows a little bit about everything. He is full of stories, some of them of a blood-curdling nature, and the calm, matter-of-fact tone in which he tells them makes them all the more impressive. There is one about an artillery bombardier who blew himself up with a live shell. It all came of being careless, and the tale should, by rights, be closely followed by a moral. It is the sort of tale that would have delighted "The Fairchild Family," and Mr. Fairchild would have made the most of it; but from the lips of Cairnan it is only an experience without any moral at all. I sometimes think that to a man of his wide knowledge of the world and its accidents, the yard must seem a tame and uneventful spot; but he is perfectly content there, like a

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storm-tossed mariner who has come to port at last.

He meanders round his gas-engine with an oil-can and lump of cotton waste, or sits in the workshop and mends things. What Cairnan cannot mend, and what he is not expected to mend, I have yet to discover. I believe he could solder together the fragments of a broken heart, and put it back in its place, firmly screwed down, oiled, and in better working order than ever. To him are brought the household wrecks; broken spectacles, clocks, knives, and some things that no power on earth could restore. He is expected to mend them all; for the faith we have in Cairnan is boundless.

One gets accustomed to finding him in all sorts of strange places, and in all manner of unusual attitudes; hanging on the outside of the banisters while he screws in a fresh electric bulb, burrowing under the

Cairnan

floor on some obscure business, vanishing down a back stair at the sight of visitors. He is always gently smiling, calm, imperturbable. He is a sort of ghost mechanic, disappearing and appearing when least expected, and haunting Dornell from basement to garret with a little black tool-bag that rattles like chains. The Beloved and The Baa-lamb dog the footsteps of Cairnan wherever he goes; there are so many interesting things he does, so many dangerous things, so many things they are strictly forbidden to do themselves. They envy Cairnan his freedom in the matter of taking things to pieces and putting them together again, and in the workshop they frequently insist on helping him. The workshop is not very big, and the flame of a blow-lamp carries a long way. In the operations of The Baa-lamb and The Beloved it is necessary that both blow-lamps should be in full blast, and that pieces of

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metal should be made red-hot and put down to cool in the most convenient places for being sat on. There is generally a distinct smell of singeing in the workshop when they are there, and they use all the tools for the wrong purposes. They break, burn and destroy, and Cairnan is most patient about it. I have never seen such a patient man. He picks up his pincers, but drops them again in a hurry; they have just been heated in the blow-lamp. Then he goes outside for an instant and returns to find his bench on fire. Sometimes he says "My Magneto" and shakes his head, sometimes he says nothing; but if The Baa-lamb happens to get burnt, Cairnan is overflowing with sympathy at once. He reads no moral lesson, he never says, I told you so; indeed he would rather suffer all manner of inconvenience to himself than smile when The Baa-lamb or The Beloved is hurt. Some

Cairnan

of the inconveniences he has to put up with are very trying. There is the toy aeroplane, the model Blériot, for example, which sails through the door and catches him behind the ear when he is mending somebody's watch. The wheels are instantly scattered over the bench and Cairnan bangs his head against a shelf. Most men would be cross, say something sharp on the spur of the moment; but he merely remarks "My Magneto" and collects his tools again. He is a marvel of endurance.

There is a special bond between Cairnan and The Baa-lamb: "The Stink Machine." The Baa-lamb originally bought it through Cairnan, so that the latter retains a personal feeling of interest and responsibility toward it, and will spend most of his spare time tinkering, oiling, caressing, experimenting with, and gloating over, this machine with The Baa-lamb. The Stink Machine is a motor-bicycle, but

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the former designation suits it best, so The Stink Machine it shall remain. The Baa-lamb has for it a devotion, tempered with anxiety, that was never surpassed by the feelings of a youth in the throes of his first love. The caprices of a woman are nothing as compared to the caprices of a motor-bicycle, and if the Baa-lamb is half as attentive to his lady-love as he is to this complex arrangement of wheels and cylinders she will not have cause to weep from neglect. At present it is, Love me, love my Stink Machine, and only our great affection for The Baa-lamb enables us to tolerate his latest infatuation. The shed where it is kept is a sort of temple for the worship of pure ungainliness, and as chief idol The Stink Machine occupies a central place, while the discarded forms of obsolete bicycles, or "push bikes" as Cairnan calls them, lean against the back wall in ignominious re-

Cairnan

tirement. Cairnan figures as high priest of the shrine and performs mystic rites with oil-can and spanner.

The Stink Machine is an ungrateful beast, a thankless monster, in a chronic state of offence with its devotees, on whom it revenges itself by lying down to die on the road like a sick camel. Then The Baa-lamb has to shove his treasure back to Cairnan's yard, but he goes on loving it with a constancy that is pathetic.

Love me, love my Stink Machine. Cairnan once informed me, in a moment of confidence, that he would follow Mr. Baa-lamb to hell—if necessary. A little preliminary experience with a machine that blows up in his face is a mere trifle in comparison. To deck The Stink Machine with what manufacturers call accessories is a never-failing delight to both The Baa-lamb and Cairnan, and they will sit for hours at a time poring over cata-

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logues in search of some new and garish adornment. Then they will go and walk round and round The Stink Machine in speechless adoration, till Cairnan suddenly makes a swoop at a nut that wants adjusting. The Beloved's share in these rites is to blow the hooter into Cairnan's ear as he bends down to examine the front wheel. This is a jest of the finest quality, and never fails to cause squeals of joy when Cairnan rubs his ear and says "Oh, My Magneto!"

But when everything is screwed up and screwed on, it is an inspiring sight to see the noble Stink Machine sail off, glittering with speedometers, sirens and patent smell-enhancers; puffing, snorting, coughing, and surmounted by The Baa-lamb curved into the shape of a young serpent. It is an inspiring sight, only it lasts too short a time. The inevitable is quick to follow; a rapid succession of bangs, a last

Cairnan

groan, and it is back to Cairnan's yard for alterations and repairs. I have come to the conclusion that Cairnan cannot swear, otherwise a bad word must long ago have slipped out. The provocation he receives is past belief. To be burnt with molten lead, to have a model Blériot shot into his eye, and to be called away from his after-dinner pipe, or from the company of his bosom friend, to resuscitate a fainting Stink Machine, are trials that could be borne smiling by no other man but him. He is never irritable, never glum, always ready to oblige, and, in fact, I do not know what we should do without him. I can see him now, a stop-watch in one hand, a fire-shovel in the other, combining the duties of stoker in the engine house and time-keeper for The Baa-lamb, who is riding a furious race against himself over a measured mile in the avenue. There is a steep path down to the yard, and Cair-

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nan rushes up it from the furnace, just in time to see The Stink Machine flash past and to bang the shovel on a post triumphantly. "I'd follow him to hell!" he says. The inspiration must have come to him through the door of his furnace.

VI

THE KIND ONE

THERE is a shadowy figure that drifts about Dornell, appearing at uncertain intervals, and departing without appreciably affecting the course of life. He is known as "The Kind One" and he comes from somewhere in the South. Nobody troubles to locate his dwelling-place more exactly, and his real name is of no significance. It is a recognised thing, that he comes and goes, and as he is a harmless, amiable sort of being, seldom in the way and needing little attention, he is accepted as a minor attribute of the establishment, welcome and yet not indispensable. He is somewhere between thirty and forty; not young, yet hardly to be called elderly; a long, thin-faced embodiment of characteristics

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mostly negative. He seems to have no particular aim in life, no family ties, no business to occupy him; and as he is undisturbed by those things that ordinarily harass mankind, his presence is rather soothing and restful.

The family is fond of him, a little contemptuously fond, perhaps, but it is impossible to treat him otherwise than kindly, because he looks, and is, so simply amiable. My Lady has reasons of her own for regarding The Kind One with a shade more definite feeling than the rest of us; he has confided to her a story, which appears to have touched her heart, and to have opened her eyes to something in him we do not comprehend. He has given her the clue to himself as he is now, and she sees what he might have been. We merely see The Kind One.

His chief ambition seems to be to smoke a pipe all day, and the only symptoms of

The Kind One

agitation he ever exhibits are when he finds himself running short of tobacco on a Saturday night. I cannot think of him apart from his pipe; a battered, burnt pipe, always drooping from the middle of his mouth, and generally bubbling softly. The Baa-lamb and The Beloved take it in turn to fill and light his pipe for him, and he is so good-natured that I have known him go half a day smokeless, because one of the boys had carried off his tobacco-pouch. They would not carry it away on purpose, for they realise that the pipe is a part of The Kind One, and that he could no more exist without it than an ordinary man could exist without food or drink. It would not be amusing to play such a trick on him, because the knowledge of his suffering would not be made diverting by the sight of him in a rage. It would be a shame to hurt The Kind One, especially as he will not lose his temper.

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He is a quaint creature, full of odd notions and habits that draw down on him the smiles of others, and yet there is an underlying quality of goodness about him that prevents smiles from ever becoming sneers. When he makes us smile, a twinkle in his own eyes shows that the jest as seen by others is not lost on him. That means a power of sympathy, and it may be just that quick, generous gift of sympathy that makes him lovable. For The Kind One is lovable, and the feeling that he is, puzzles a great many men, who are not used to the quality in the male sex, and explains the influence he would have with women if he chose to exert it. But he does not care to influence others, and is quite indifferent to the impression he may make on them; he is content to drift along in his course, and to let folk wonder if they will.

The boys treat him as a mild joke, tease him, play tricks on him, and he always

The Kind One

lends himself to their humour. He has an intuitive understanding of the young, children and puppies gravitate toward him naturally, and sometimes I have caught the responsive recognition in a glance or quick action from one of the yellow-headed band. It is an unconscious tribute, except from Cynthia. Cynthia has adopted The Kind One as a sort of foundling and her attitude toward him is a mixture of the romantic and the maternal. She reaches a little above his elbow, and yet she protects him, and she will sit gazing at him with looks that plainly idealise his homely form.

She can scarcely bear to laugh when he is ridiculous, and she is vexed when others laugh. It is as though her heroic ideal suffers indignity, and her foundling slight, which makes her jealous on his account. She would prefer him always to be a hero, and no man can sustain that pose for ever. The Kind One fails just as

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another would, unconsciously, because he never dreams of being admirable. There is sometimes a suspicion of mockery in his speech, and if one forgets for a moment that this is The Kind One, incapable of guile, one is apt to feel injured.

I have seen our friend, The Colonel, look puzzled and uncertain when The Kind One makes an apparently innocent remark. He is never quite sure that the words are as innocent as they seem, and The Colonel likes a soldierly directness of expression. He mistrusts The Kind One and puffs out his cheeks at his extreme simplicity. In all transparent natures there are deep spots, like holes in the shingly bed of a stream. Quite unexpectedly we get beyond our depth, and the surprise we feel is as disconcerting as a plunge into cold water. The Colonel must have taken one such plunge, at least, because he, unlike the rest of us, main-

The Kind One

tains a wariness toward The Kind One.

But in reality The Kind One is easily fathomed; there are few deep places to the bottom of which we cannot see, and there is always one explanation to fit whatever he says or does. The explanation is that he is The Kind One, whose ways are not the ways of ordinary folk. If we want to be very severe, we call him eccentric. He likes to moon about the woods, and has a special affection for pine-trees; but he never imparts his thoughts to us, because he considers us unworthy. I know he considers me unworthy in a special degree, and that he is sure I could not understand the subtle poetry of the woods. It is a little provoking to be treated thus, as though I were incapable of seeing what he sees, and of gathering the same sensations as he gathers. A materialist I may be, but I have my better moments, and I

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cannot think of The Kind One as altogether kind when he denies me all beauty of thought and imagination.

He is trying to teach Cynthia to see the wonderful effects of light among the pines. At present she only sees squirrels, but she has a dim notion of what he means. Dear Cynthia! she is always ready to oblige her friends. The Kind One gathers a little encouragement from the attitude of Cynthia, but The Baa-lamb and The Beloved decline to be his pupils. Neither in the pine-woods, nor in the bosky dell called Tempe will they see romance. Grandeur means nothing at all to them, and romance flies shivering to the loftiest tree-tops when they yell for an echo among the rocks. He talks about the calm and sweets of nature; they have bull's-eyes in their pockets, which attract them more. They are cheerful Philistines without an ounce of sentiment in their composition. I

The Kind One

have known them to take ginger-beer bottles into Tempe, and drink in the face of a crimson sunset.

No wonder The Kind One prefers the company of Cynthia. And there is another reason why he should be friends with her. She knows his secret, and he can talk to her of other things than light effects. One evening I was on the hill where the pine-trees grow, behind Dornell. It was a still summer evening, and all about me rose the tall pillars of the wood in solemn ranks to meet the dusky shade of branches far above. Underfoot were the crisp pine-needles, and from the summit of the hill I looked down upon the valley, all aglow with sunset, to where lay Dornell, the river and the sleepy fields of corn. The river, like a broad, silver band, curved away to the east, while along the horizon, dim and blue, stretched the sea. The west was cloudless, a perfect sweep of

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tones from red to sapphire blue, and the stems of the pine-trees, touched here and there with light, were stained a rich madder-brown. It was a scene as near perfection as anything this earth can show, and like the almost perfect, it was just a trifle sad—the sea, and the river, and the glowing west. As I stood there I heard voices, or rather a voice, from somewhere below me in the wood. A monotonous croak it was, like the croak of an aged raven trying to repeat poetry, and it roused my curiosity. Then I saw The Kind One and Cynthia. He was sprawling on an elbow, and she was watching him with her most rapt and serious expression. I could see her side-face, and the gleams of sunlight were falling on her hair, so that she looked like an angel. It was Cynthia's face that made me feel an intruder, and that caused me to slip quietly away without being noticed, though I would have given much

The Kind One

to know what The Kind One was croaking about, and why he sprawled there in an attitude so stricken.

The explanation dawned upon me later, when Cynthia asked me if I had ever been in love. This also explains The Kind One.

VII

MISS MORELAND

MISS MORELAND keeps a school for little boys whose parents are in India, or in other parts of our empire where little boys do not thrive. There are generally eight or nine of these young waifs, who live all the year round with Miss Moreland, and a sprinkling of boys more fortunate, who have relations in England, and homes of their own to go to in the holidays. But the waifs have a mother in Miss Moreland, while they remain beneath her roof, and their lot is far from sorrowful. True, they are subject to a fine, old-fashioned discipline, but Miss Moreland is old-fashioned in every detail of her life, even to the extent of wearing caps, and side-curls, which are grey and

Miss Moreland

very neat. Her face is rather grim, with large features that give her a somewhat man-like appearance; but her heart is altogether womanly, so that she more often shakes her cane than uses it. She is fond of proverbs about sparing the rod, and in theory is a rigorous Spartan; all the same, her little boys are not in the least afraid of her, and a whacking now and then does not impair their confidence.

Miss Moreland does not teach in her school, on account of her mathematics, which are weak, so she has a master for the boys, but reserves the right of judging sinners and of punishing them for herself. No one is allowed to whack a boy except Miss Moreland, because she holds the administration of stripes to be a parental duty, and not one that should be intrusted to a mere usher. The parents of these boys are far away; they cannot whack their offspring; therefore the duty

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devolves upon Miss Moreland, who stands temporarily in the place of a parent. This she always explains to each victim who is whacked. There may, or may not, have been a romance in the early life of Miss Moreland. Her father was a Scottish minister, and she an only child. She must have been handsome as a girl, but there is no record of her ever having been in love, or of her ever having been sought in marriage. Yet she is neither a sour old-maid, nor does she bear the looks of one who has suffered disappointment, and if romance did once invade her life, she has buried the memory of it so well that the world has forgotten. Miss Moreland she has always been, and Miss Moreland she will remain to the end of her days, and if she owns a secret it will die with her, for she is not a woman to keep tokens, or old letters, in a desk.

It is a pleasant spot where the school

Miss Moreland

stands. There are trees about it, and a white wall facing the road. Miss Moreland has her private gate, the school has a gate of its own; but the whole house is of a piece, white, snug and cheerful, with green fields on every side, and an orchard where there is a pond. If boys fall into the pond, they are put to bed till their clothes are dry; if they steal apples they go to bed for a whole day, and have nauseous physic given them as well. Miss Moreland knows better than to cane boys for stealing apples. The probability of a licking is always taken into consideration when we go to rob orchards; but the prospect of a day in bed with physic is apt to daunt the stoutest heart.

My Lady has a great respect for Miss Moreland, I think she is a little afraid of her, and feels meek in her presence; but Miss Moreland is always very kind

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to My Lady, and pats her hand encouragingly. On Sunday afternoons we often walk from Dornell to the school, and pay a visit to Miss Moreland in her trim, lavender-scented drawing-room. She has a silk gown for Sundays, and a cap of state, and we generally find her with the Bible, or a Book of Homilies beside her. She meditates on Sunday afternoon, but when we arrive, she shuts her book, takes off her spectacles, and gives us a hearty welcome. We are all welcome,—Cynthia, The Baa-lamb, The Beloved,—and though Miss Moreland is a schoolmistress and her house a school, the boys seem undismayed. They grin with friendly breadth, and Miss Moreland nods at them approvingly. She does approve of the boys, and in their holiday time she sends young Anglo-Indians to play with them at Dornell. All the little boys who come to Dornell fall victims to the charms of

Miss Moreland

Cairnan's yard, and most of them are quite determined to be engineers, like Cairnan. His workshop is a fascinating place to them, and to be master of such a splendid treasure-house is the private ambition of each one. They worship Cairnan, but not one of them dares worship Cynthia, or, at any rate, show an open admiration. Cynthia scorns little boys from Miss Moreland's school, because her most intimate friends are grown men, beside whom little boys are insignificant and crude. Still, she likes coming with us to visit Miss Moreland, and appreciates her grim remarks in quite a grown-up way. The Baa-lamb and The Beloved approve of Miss Moreland on account of the excellent things her cupboards contain. Excellent things to eat and drink; raspberry vinegar, cake, and ginger-wine. The latter is a trifle medicinal to taste, but they drink it, because it is produced

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at unseasonable hours, and is therefore desirable.

When we sit in Miss Moreland's room of a Sunday afternoon, the same arrangement is always observed. My Lady and our hostess sit apart, close to the Bible and the Book of Homilies, and form a sort of interested audience while the rest of us, in a row on chairs, sip home-made wines and munch cake. Miss Moreland looks at us, and smiles in her grim manner, and nods. Then she turns to pat My Lady's hand with quite a different smile. The refreshments are brought in on a tray by a maid called Mary McKie, who is never addressed except by both her names, and whose face is so red, and hard, and angry, that one would never suspect her of having a kind heart, and of treating little boys to apples on the sly. Yet she does, and Miss Moreland gets confused next time she counts the apple store. Mary

Miss Moreland

McKie speaks of the little boys, whose parents are abroad, as poor, unfortunate babes, and she thinks the parents are unnatural monsters, because they go away to the ends of the earth and leave the bits of laddies to the mercy of a stranger. She is convinced that she alone stands between these children and tyranny, while Miss Moreland is privately certain that Mary McKie would bully her charges, were there not a vigilant eye to overlook her acts.

Yet both these women have the softest hearts imaginable, and a simplicity that their grim manners cannot hide. They are imposed upon continually; villagers with artful tales of woe, tramps and beggars, and all who would turn a penny easily come to Miss Moreland. She has work in the garden for those who will work, gifts for those who cannot, and soup for everybody. No beggar is ever sent

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away from her house empty. He is filled and fed from a large, black pot that simmers constantly beside the kitchen fire. A bowl of soup and a penny was the usual dole, till Mary McKie discovered a tramp in the act of pouring soup down the yard drain; after which the dole was reduced to a halfpenny, and the soup stopped altogether. Then, according to a well-established legend, the fraternity of tramps went out on strike, and Miss Moreland was obliged to raise their pay to the old standard before they would again patronise her flesh-pots. But even that unhappy episode has not in the least degree affected Miss Moreland's charity, and I myself have seen Mary McKie stride, like an avenging amazon, from the kitchen door to cram a discarded hat of her own upon the head of a small beggar-child, whose parent had just filched the scrubbing-brush. Mary's face was black as thunder

Miss Moreland

all the while, and yet the child looked up at her and laughed.

If Miss Moreland had been watching through a peep-hole in the garden hedge, she would have frowned, and gone away to ring the bell, in case Mary McKie should foolishly part with all her wardrobe. In the meantime, we in the drawing-room have finished our cake and wine, and The Beloved has scooped up the crumbs with the fire-shovel. Miss Moreland makes one of us do this on every occasion when we eat cake in her house. It is an act of discipline, as it were, to prevent us from feeling too self-satisfied after the ginger-wine. We rise to say good-bye; but before we go, Mary McKie is told to fetch a jar of bramble jam. It is a present for The Beloved, a reward for scooping up the crumbs, and Mary McKie hands it to him with awful warnings as to which is right side up. She

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would like to kiss The Baa-lamb, but, knowing the nature of boys, she frowns at him instead, and drives us into the garden, like a flock of geese, while My Lady and Miss Moreland kiss and pat each other in the hall.

VIII

IN THE DUSK

THERE is a sofa in the big saloon; a restful sofa, with cushions, that has not a hard place in it. Broad and deep, it stands apart, like the white bench in the garden, as a proper lounging-spot for dreams and idleness. A poet might dream his winter visions there, just as in summer he might choose the garden bench to sit on while he wove a mid-June romance. But a poet at Dornell would live a sorry life, unless he were a children's poet, and then, perhaps, he might discover delicate thoughts for verse in the gambols of The Baa-lamb. Had I possessed an ounce of poetry in my being, it would have been squeezed from me long ago upon the sofa, when, as the bottom layer of a warm and pounding

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mass, I have experienced the full charm of childhood's presence. Cynthia at such times seems to be all angles; elbows, knees, knuckles, and they hurt abominably; as for The Beloved, I have feebly wondered how he got his name, and how he expects any one to love him when he claws their hair. Imagine the locks of a poet in his grasp!

No, we are not poets, nor are we given to romance; still there are some hours when the sofa is not a battle-ground, when angles smooth themselves into curves as soft as the cushions, and riot gives place to something that is, at least, suggestive of romance. I have Cynthia in my mind, Cynthia and My Lady in the dusk of a summer evening in the big saloon. My Lady is at the piano, and as she touches the keys a chord within Cynthia responds. How well I know Cynthia in that mood! It comes to her only at such times as these,

In the Dusk

and afflicts her with a pensive yearning to be loved, so that she sits in a corner of the sofa and looks—at me. Just looks, but her eyes are very blue and bright, and eloquent without the help of words. It is an invitation, framed in Cynthia's own way, and irresistible as she is. I know what is required of me, for we have acted the same little scene before, and I am perfect in my part.

These old-fashioned airs of Mozart and Beethoven! No music in the world can touch their melody, and they always bring back to me recollections of Dornell, the scent of mignonette, and Cynthia's pretty wooing in the dusk. It is pleasant to be wooed by Cynthia; it comes as a reward after much strife, and we two go sweet-hearting in a country of our own, hand-in-hand while the music casts its spell. My duty is to be passive, rather than responsive in behaviour, so I sit quite still be-

The House of Dornell

side Cynthia on the sofa and wait. The first move is hers—and the last, which is generally a punch in the ribs—but that comes much later on, and for the present I am delicately expectant. After a while, a hand slips very gently through my arm, so gently that I can hardly feel it, and so shyly that I dare not stir lest it should be withdrawn. Then by degrees her fingers creep along, till they fit themselves, one by one, between my fingers and remain there, firmly clasped, while her body inclines toward me, until her head rests just below my shoulder. How lightly it rests! It is the gossamer touch of a fairy, scarcely more perceptible than a yellow sunbeam playing on my sleeve, and, like a sunbeam, it is warm and bright. What a contrast to the bumps of half an hour ago!

I glance down to make sure that this is really Cynthia, because I am so used to

In the Dusk

bumps that this nestling seems always new and strange. Our spirits are very much at peace as we sit thus, and I reflect with satisfaction that The Baa-lamb, and The Beloved are not likely to break in upon our peace. They are with Cairnan, the electrician, damaging his workshop, or helping him to mend the kitchen clock, and in such occupations they are better employed than in tormenting us. Cairnan plays the bagpipes, to the music of which howls and yells are a natural accompaniment, and The Baa-lamb enjoys cheerful music; besides, he knows that the Highland soul of Cairnan floats away on the strains of his own melody, so that he becomes oblivious to earthly details. While Cairnan bewails Lochaber on the pipes, The Baa-lamb filches his screw-driver. The Beloved has a taste for the music of a gramophone, and Cynthia was once so led away as to suppose that I could dally

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with sentiment to the tune of a music-hall ballad on a scratched disc. That was long ago; quite in the early days of our courtship, and before Cynthia had developed an artistic feeling. She has learned discrimination since then, she would resent the gramophone now; but all the same, were Cairnan to pass the door with his little black tool-bag, I fear she would cast me off and flee to him. What are the thoughts of Cynthia, as she sits beside me in the sofa corner? Her eyes have in them a faraway look, which may mean that she is thinking of the sheds in Cairnan's yard, and of her brothers delightfully employed there. I wonder, and I have often wondered, what the fancies are that pass through Cynthia's mind when she is pensive. It would be idle to inquire, because she would only laugh, and shake herself, and say she did not know, which would probably be the truth, and,

In the Dusk

for my part, I am quite content to leave her fancies unexplored. We might, to all appearance, be asleep in that corner of the sofa; but we are not, because these hours are too precious to be wasted in sleep, being, as they are, Cynthia's and mine; our own apart from the common hours of day. If Cynthia has been vexed or grieved, I know it by the feeling of her clasp, and if she wants to thank me, or to say that she is glad, her hand on mine gives the impression, rather than the reality, of a caress. It is an unspoken interchange of sentiments between us, and I no longer can believe she pines for Cairnan. I think My Lady appreciates these quiet intervals as much as we do, and that she would miss our dreamy pauses at twilight; but, like Cynthia, she seldom puts in words her private thoughts. If we were absent she would still play soft airs on the piano, and if she missed us she

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would never tell. Yet all three of us would feel a blank somewhere in our existence, and a sense of loss, without our evening's music in the big saloon.

There is a quiver of sunlight on the broad steps outside the door, where the last rays always linger, and I know that in the west the sky is red and orange. The cedar-trees on the lawn, and the sundial, throw their shadows across the turf, and the garden scents rise up from the warm ground. How many scents there are! Each one distinct, and all blending together, like notes of music, in a perfect harmony. The doorway is a picture-frame, and through it we can see the fields, some green, some gold with the barley harvest, that slope toward the river. Again I look at Cynthia, dream-child, or imp of Satan, as the mood prompts her. With what thoughts is that yellow head of yours

In the Dusk

busy? Do you weave fancies from the changing lights upon the river, or are you simply drowsy? Cynthia's eyes are fixed upon the river, full with the tide that sweeps in from the sea, and her fingers tighten on my hand. The evening landscape is warm and homely; but the river is mysterious. Under the banks where the hills come down to the water's edge, there are strange dark shadows, purple, and green, and black that are full of mystery, while even the mid-stream with its red and orange tints seems to hold secrets we cannot understand. There is something almost uncanny in a great and silent river, particularly when there are no ships upon it, and one might reasonably expect to find goblins and kelpies haunting those shores beneath the hills. The woods are very sombre against the sky, but even as we look, the light breaks suddenly across them from the west, and their shadows are gone.

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They are pleasant woods to look at now, and Cynthia feels the change as I do.

The music has drifted into something that is not Mozart. I do not know what it is My Lady plays, but the air began as the light struck the green line of hills beyond the river, which shows that her eyes and fancy have been following ours. Unspoken sympathy—unspoken, yet so true—exists between us three: My Lady, Cynthia and myself.

With the final chord the spell is broken. Ordinary sounds of life are heard again; the dressing-bell, the boys' voices, and the scampering of dogs along the passage. Cynthia wakes to tell us she is hungry, and then she hits me in the ribs, so that I come back from dream-land in a hurry. A strenuous recall to actualities it is; but still, whenever I hear certain airs played softly in the gloaming, the scene just past returns to me, and I am once more in the

In the Dusk

big saloon at Dornell, watching the river
change its hues, feeling again the golden
head of a dream-child lie close against my
shoulder.

IX

THE COLONEL

HE is one of those brave old boys to whom the winning of a Victoria Cross means no more than that he has helped some poor fellow out of a hole. He thinks nothing of the deed that won him fame, and I do not suppose it ever strikes him that his action on the battlefield was in any way brave or remarkable. He is modest, like all true heroes, and like a child he is simple. Old, stout, white-haired, he comes to Dornell with his cheery laugh, a laugh that chokes him when the jest is good, and his arrival is like the coming of a gale, because we have to roar at him to make him hear. He is a boy among boys, there never was a heart so young as his, and few young men can appreciate the smaller

The Colonel

joys of life as he can. A jaunt to a fair, a picnic, an afternoon with children at the pantomime are all joys to him, and the freshness of his delight never flags.

At Dornell he has his own room, The Colonel's room, which he regards as his by right of long occupancy, and because he keeps some of his clothes in a cupboard there. The key of that cupboard is carried about in The Colonel's pocket, he takes it away with him when he goes, and the first thing he does on returning is to unlock the door and air his things. The Colonel's suits are wide and baggy; he needs space to expand in when he chuckles, and a tight waistcoat would be fatal when he makes, or sees, a joke. He relishes a joke, though often he gets an entirely wrong idea of its true form; but, generally speaking, the result as retailed by him is an improvement on the original. Sometimes it is hard to detect the original after The

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Colonel has improved upon it, for he is so deaf and so naturally full of humour, that out of two words correctly heard he will compose a tale with a joke in it like an earthquake. When he does this nobody tries to put him right; his story is always so much better than the authentic version, and it is worth while allowing one's best tale to be ruined only to see him chuckle and rub his legs.

His deafness does not trouble him in the least; he has an answer ready at all times, and if it is not the appropriate one, our wits have to be nimble in the emergency. Nobody could imagine that The Colonel wished to be insulting; he is a gentleman in the true sense of the word, and the fineness of his feelings is such that he would not willingly affront his worst enemy. I think The Beloved will grow into something like The Colonel, for there are points even now, in which they resemble

The Colonel

one another. They both have a tendency toward plumpness, The Colonel is short of breath, The Beloved breathes hard when he meditates, and their hearts are equally tender. Neither of them would hurt a fly, though The Colonel has caused pain to tigers, and there is the same truthful simplicity about them both, and a touch of something vaguely pathetic. Yes, I can see The Beloved, through a dim vista of years, becoming as The Colonel is; the boy is father to the man, and survives in some men to the end of their days. The Colonel has no sons of his own; he is a bachelor, and lives half the year at his club in London. The remaining six months he divides among a circle of well-established friends.

Everybody likes The Colonel. The children like him, the dogs (with the exception of Anthony Stinkins, who hates all men on principle) like him, and the serv-

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ants know him as an open-handed gentleman, wherefore they like him too. He takes a deep and serious interest in any little domestic trouble, and is just the sort of man who would be asked, at a crisis, to give the footman good advice. He would do it, too, gladly, and if the footman showed proper penitence The Colonel would reward him with half a crown.

But there is one person, not counting Mr. Stinkins, on whom The Colonel exercises an unhappy effect. Cairnan does not like him, for reasons of his own, and whenever we take our old friend to visit Cairnan at the yard, there is sure to be something urgently wrong with the gas-engine or dynamos. The Colonel is pleased to consider himself scientific, and is fond of giving us little lectures on steam and electricity, and of prodding wheels with his walking-stick. Cairnan resents

The Colonel

this kind of behaviour in his own particular sheds, and becomes uncommunicative when he is asked questions. Then The Colonel imagines that Cairnan is deaf and bellows at him, whereupon Cairnan makes use of his subtle knowledge to cause an explosion, in order to terrify The Colonel. In this respect he is generally successful, for The Colonel, in spite of his scientific tendencies, is profoundly ignorant of engines and their ways. He is distrustful of all machinery, and Cairnan can assume the air of one seriously alarmed; so that when an explosion occurs, and Cairnan leaps back with an arm sheltering his face, The Colonel tumbles out of the door in a hurry. He calls it "confoundedly dangerous," and goes away to tell The Master of the House how unsafe it is for children to loiter round "that infernal shed." We hear him arguing at the top of his voice, and know that The Master of the House

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is trying to lure him down to the garden in order to admire the vines. We sneak back to Cairnan, whom we find wiping his hands on a lump of cotton waste and whistling softly to himself.

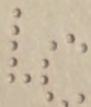
The fact of the matter is that Cairnan is jealous. He thinks The Baa-lamb pays far too much attention to The Colonel, and that he himself is neglected. The Stink Machine, too, the precious motor-bicycle. That The Baa-lamb should prefer the company of an old man full of ignorance to the Stink Machine is a disappointing circumstance that particularly pains the heart of Cairnan. What is the use of being ready to follow a boy to hell, if that boy will insist on following the tame footsteps of a wheezy old gentleman? Cairnan does not say this, but he implies it, and when we go back to him he nods his head, as though to remark "just so."

Cairnan should remember that the car-

The Colonel

penter is just as jealous of him as he is of The Colonel, and that the keeper is jealous of the carpenter when the boys spend an afternoon at the sawmill, and that to be fair to all, a man or boy must live in a state of perpetual aloofness incompatible with human nature.

The Colonel is innocent of all intention to hurt the feelings of anybody, and his whiff of ill-humor is soon past. By tea-time he is crowing over a new joke, and tells us wonderful tales about the Indian Mutiny and The Crimea. He has a habit of falling asleep unexpectedly, his only symptom of senile decay, but even when he sleeps he contrives to give us entertainment. He issues commands to imaginary troops, shoots visionary bears, and sets himself on fire with his pipe. When he wakes and sees a ring of grinning faces round him, he is quite pleased, and tells us another story of the siege of Delhi.



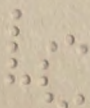
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What a kind old man he is! He takes the greatest interest in the welfare of others, and will go out of his way at any time to help a lame dog over a stile, or to pull a drunken man off the road. He has had several fights with drunkards whom he wished to save from dangerous positions, but he will go on saving them just the same, and the publicity of his encounters affects him not at all. There is always a quaintness in The Colonel's acts, which prevents one from feeling overcome by his kindness. At Dornell he invariably bangs upon my bedroom door after he has had his bath in the morning, for fear I may be late for prayers. On the first occasion he forgot to tell me that he had turned the water on, so that there was a flood in the house for which I was blamed. The Colonel thinks so much of other folk that he very often neglects to look after himself, and blunders into strange predica-



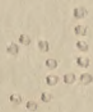
The Colonel

ments, simply through not taking ordinary precautions. He never asks himself what the consequences are likely to be; he just does the thing, and makes a joke when the consequences are unfortunate. There is so much of the boy in him, such a fund of impetuous gallantry, that his old body can scarcely bear the strain. His nature tempts him to defy years and prudence. That is how he wears The Victoria Cross, and that is how he will meet his death, so his friends say. But The Colonel cares nothing for death. Life to him is no round of precautionary measures against chills and the gout; he enjoys the world, and life while it lasts, and when the end comes to him he will face it like the brave old soldier that he is. Some day we shall miss The Colonel, and at Dornell when the west is red against the pine-trees, and the evening stillness broods upon the fields, we shall think of him, as he loved at such



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an hour to sit, amidst the children and the dogs, on the broad steps that overlook the river and the placid woods beyond.



X

GUARDED TREASURES

IN most households there are certain drawers and cupboards, guarded with jealous care, that contain treasures more precious to those who own them than all the world's wealth besides. I mean those drawers and shelves in which are stowed away things worthless to the common eye, meaningless to those who have not shared with one or two of us the secret of their value—the memories and associations they recall. There are letters in school-boy round-hand, mats and kettle-holders worked in brilliant wools, models made by the boys in the workshops at school, queer little gifts by which children show their love, and all sorts of odds and ends connected with childhood. When such draw-

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ers and cupboards are opened it is with a gentle hand, and the eyes that look on their contents are never the same eyes the world knows.

It may be ridiculous to think of an elderly woman, one we have known in circumstances not the least tender or romantic, bowing in worship over a kettle-holder stitched in black and yellow wool; and it may be equally ridiculous to think of a middle-aged man of acknowledged sanity in the affairs of every day, handling with pride and delight pieces of a wooden model made by one of his boys at school, and presented to him on the first day of the holidays. Such notions may be absurd—as absurd as a packet of old love-letters—but we keep our treasures under lock and key and our absurdities hid, so that we may still pass for what we would seem to be, common-sense folk without imaginations.

Guarded Treasures

At Dornell, we like to think ourselves practical, and unromantic, but there is a treasure-cupboard in the house, all the same, and its shelves hold as absurd a collection of trifles as can well be conceived. True, some apology for weakness might be found in the fact that each article is neatly tied up and labelled; there is an orderly method in the arrangement of the shelves that suggests a business mind; but this very scrupulous regard for detail seems only to emphasise weakness, not to hide it. Affection stands betrayed in the folding of a paper, pride in the tying of a string. One shelf holds specimens of what The Baa-lamb has made in the workshops, and the labels on each bear his name and a date. The triumph of such inscription is obvious. The brass screw he turned at the age of fourteen needs just those few words to enhance its merits. "Aged fourteen." What more

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can be said—what further comment is necessary on the genius that wrought this long, brass screw? It is a better memorial of The Baa-lamb than would be a golden curl from his tousled head. The hard-fisted, unromantic Baa-lamb would never rest content until he had destroyed that curl; whereas he is rather proud of the brass screw, and satisfied that it should be admired. There are technical points about a screw that none but an expert can appreciate, and Cairnan has spoken favourably of its thread, so that The Baa-lamb feels he has some right to be proud. The praise of Cairnan in matters mechanical is worth more than the ignorant admiration of an obliging stranger.

The Beloved is not a mechanical genius. He is represented in the treasure-cupboard by milder, though no less characteristic tokens. Bundles of laudatory school reports, letters from masters, letters from

Guarded Treasures

himself, and an old school diary. The Beloved has a mind methodical, and the chronicles of his early life are pencilled among classroom notes, and carefully entered items of personal expenditure. The Beloved has a methodical mind, and a gift for justifying his name. In the treasure-cupboard there is nothing sad; nothing too sacred for even the eyes of an old friend to look upon. But there are some things with a whimsical sort of pathos attached to them. Cynthia's wool-mat, or kettle-holder—it might be either—is one of them, and I can realise the pain it must have cost my sweetheart to complete that gaudy square of red and blue. Cynthia is not a person one would naturally connect with patient needle-work; she has not the temperament that delights in plain sewing, and the beauty of housewifely industry does not appeal to her. She pricks her fingers, breaks her thread, and uses expressions,

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strong enough to call for reproof from a long-suffering teacher. If she could stand on her head and sew with her feet, she would be perfectly happy. The performance would be one to evoke admiration, and to excite envy in the hearts of all beholders. But to sit on a chair and sew a straight seam is an occupation derogatory in the eyes of Cynthia.

The Colonel, her old friend, tells her she will never make a good wife unless she learns to sew on buttons; but his idea of wifely duty does not touch Cynthia, and marriage seems to her, after all, a poor reward for so much suffering. The kettle-holder was worked as a birthday present for her father; a secret flaunted before him for months, a thing that forced itself upon every one's attention by reason of its brilliancy, an object fraught with the terror of a stumpy needle, which seemed ubiquitous throughout Dornell,

Guarded Treasures

particularly in deep arm-chairs and sofa corners. The Master of the House once flung the kettle-holder out of the window; he had some excuse and was ignorant of its final destination; but Cynthia wept, because she intended it for him and he seemed to despise it. It was a question with her for some time whether she should present her offering or not; but when she did, with blushes and diffidence, her father called it beautiful and straightway hid its glory in the treasure-cupboard.

It would have pleased Cynthia better, had he hung it on a nail beside the fire. Kettle-holders should hang thus, and its immediate disappearance may have awakened suspicions in her breast. She did not know that her canvas kettle-holder had gone to occupy a place of honour, and she has never tried to make another.

The treasure-cupboard is, as it were, a centre from which spring delicate threads

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of remembrance all through the house. Dornell has its children, and we are never allowed to forget them. Tokens of them meet us everywhere, and the atmosphere breathes an essence of their creating. On the walls of My Lady's room hang photographs, likenesses of The Baa-lamb in a kilt, and of The Beloved in something less, which cause the originals to turn red with shame, and to deny that they ever could have been so fat or so indelicate. There is a picture of Cynthia in the drawing-room; a pretty picture, though not in the least like her. It represents a dream-child and Cynthia hates it with all her heart and soul. The eyes in particular vex her, because they follow her about reproachfully, and make her think of all the things an ideal Cynthia would have done, and which she, the real Cynthia, has neglected. It is as though her conscience had been transferred to canvas as a reproach to her

Guarded Treasures

for evermore. No wonder she hates the picture; still I could envy her the possession of so fair a conscience.

The Baa-lamb used to tease her about that picture, till I discovered his own double in Little Cupid on the summer house. Since then he has avoided the subject of likenesses, and I have won the lasting gratitude of Cynthia.

It is good to be a friend in such a house as Dornell, and to know that I am one of very few for whom the doors of the treasure-cupboard have been unlocked. I am allowed to see what is hid from the world in general, and of this honour I am deeply sensible. Sometimes it is considered necessary to make me an apology; but they are not genuine apologies, only forms lest I should fail to mark the privilege conferred on me. When The Master of the House unlocks the doors, and shows me the latest model, or the last report from

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a satisfied schoolmaster, I understand how he feels, even when he affects to treat these objects lightly. I like him better at such times, when he gloats over the pieces of a model he does not comprehend, or exhibits a school report of surpassing excellence, than at any other time in our intercourse. His simulated carelessness is a delight, and yet I dare not smile, in case he should misconstrue the act. With My Lady it is altogether different. I smile to her and she returns my smile. Dear me, how ridiculous it all is! How absurdly childish we are! But still the subtle undercurrent of unspoken sympathy between us flows from one to the other, even as we smile, and so, with a smile and a perfect understanding, we go on to the next shelf.

XI

THE SCRATCHER

“Give me the withered leaves I chose
Before in the old time.”

IN order to be a Scratcher two things are needed: an old broom and a philosophic temperament. The broom is for sweeping up dead leaves, and the temperament of a philosopher is most necessary when the wind blows them away. Who but a philosopher could calmly see the labour of a whole morning scattered far and wide by a mischievous breeze springing up at mid-day? It is the common fate of a scratcher's labour to be rendered futile by a puff of air, for as fast as he gets together a heap of leaves, all dry, light and crisp, the wind comes with a shout of triumph and romps over

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it. Then the scratcher has to begin his task again, and so the struggle goes on, till the breeze becomes weary and the man prevails.

The scratcher knows not the word defeat in connection with leaves, and he will go steadily on, raking them together and seeing them blow back to their original haunts, with an imperturbable spirit that cannot be daunted. I believe he resents a calm day; it gives him an unfair advantage over his enemy the wind, and when the wind is absent the scratcher feels the flatness and insipidity of unopposed success. Besides, he knows that when the heaps are once made, he will have to wheel them away in a barrow, and wheeling lacks all the poetry and art of scratching.

One may scratch in a reverie, dream lovely thoughts, soothed by the motion and rustling sound; sing little songs to

The Scratcher

oneself, or plan a week's work in advance. With a wheel-barrow there is no sentiment, no poetry; it is dull, mechanical plodding, and if one dreams at all, it is only of dinner and the hour of rest. No scratcher should be asked to wheel a barrow; it destroys the perfect scheme of his existence, and turns a mild philosopher into a complaining victim. The true scratcher is a man of fine feeling, an unconscious artist, a dreamer, not a toiler; and as other artists specialise in one particular subject, so he specialises in his own branch of gardening. He takes a rough and tangled bank and makes a picture of it; he will tell you it is a picture, and help you to admire it as long as you like. The tools of his profession are few and simple: a broom well-worn and a rake that is all but toothless. With these he works transformations in a garden.

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Set him to wheel a barrow and an ideal is destroyed; it is like asking Mr. Farquharson to mix paint for the village carpenter, or Mr. Alfred Austin to compose Limericks. It is an outrage upon art and congruity, and the scratcher feels it as such. He becomes care-worn, bandy-legged, old; a suffering martyr whose pain moves one to take the barrow and to send him back to the futile gathering of leaves.

But to cause a scratcher deeper pain (yet who would be so barbarous as to try?) it is only necessary to get him a new rake and broom. The sight of them sets him sniffing at once, for however ill-fitted his old ones may be to the practical needs of a gardener, he clings to them with an affection that associations alone can justify. He loves his old broom; it reminds him of still winter days, when the garden paths hold all the warmth of the

The Scratcher

sun, and a man may dawdle round them, making believe that it is summer. It is thus with all old things: old clothes, old friends, old brooms. Associations make them dear to us, so that we resent the coming of new things.

The scratcher has kept that broom of his, a handful of twigs tied to a stake, for many years, and it has become to him a precious relic, growing more precious as its twigs decrease. He hides it jealously each night in a secret hole beneath a rhododendron bush. The tool-house is unworthy of his treasure, and he would rather lodge it in a bower contrived by himself in defiance of law, where it can repose amid familiar surroundings, and in company with the toothless rake. Both rake and broom are weather-worn and long past work, the leaves treat their interference with contempt, and they prolong an hour's task to the extent of a whole day. Yet

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the scratcher clings to them; he will have none of your brand-new besoms or rakes with rows of teeth like sharks. If he is given new tools, he will look at them with deep distrust. He will examine the broom, shake his head at it, sniff at it, and if he does condescend to use it, it will not be till he has reduced its bushiness with a knife. A new rake he does not mind so much; a few tugs among the long grass and the teeth will come out naturally. But it is only when he has reformed the new to the pattern of the old that he recovers his habitual peace and serenity.

The scratcher is an artist by instinct and tradition. To see him switch the leaves out of a bush with the two teeth at one corner of his rake is to realise the true beauty of futility. There is something admirable in the way he persists against all arguments of common

The Scratcher

sense, something archaic, something that speaks of the dim past when time was of no account. The example of patient industry would be perfect, were it not so obviously in vain. Nobody can argue with a scratcher, because he has a fund of obstinacy, and an endless store of experience from which to quote. He knows his job far better than you do, and makes it plain that he does. If you observe that he is not getting on very fast with his work, he will first look surprised, then incredulous, and lastly injured. If you persist, reminding him that life is short and that the garden is large, he will turn up his rake and examine it reflectively. Then he will say that "she" needs some new teeth in her, and that, after he has got his knife sharpened, he will proceed to the wood-shed and cut some. That, of course, would mean a whole day wasted, so in despair you leave him

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to deal with the rubbish in his own way. He sees you go and winks solemnly.

Sometimes scratchers go in herds or bands; then they are called "policy men," and the name seems to fit them. Their policy is to devise a system by which ten men can do the work of one; it is a wholesome policy and keeps them occupied, if not busy. They help each other systematically; there is no confusion, no haste, no unseemly running to and fro; they work like a machine, gently, silently, unemotionally. They work in unison, and they stop in unison, with an accuracy no machine could surpass. If they can see a bit of the road, they stop to watch every motor-car go past; if a carriage comes up the avenue they stop to gaze after it, if there is a cow in a field they stop to observe it, from time to time. If the master comes along they scratch as those

The Scratcher

scratch who see nothing in the world beyond dead leaves.

Seldom does the scratcher's calm give way. It takes a violent shock to rouse him, and I have only once seen the deed accomplished. He was one of a band of policy men, a venerable person, a patriarch among scratchers, and as deaf, to use his own description, "as a beetle." He had never been known to hurry, never been seen to run, and his work was a mystery, carried on in the middle of the road with a small rake. A motor-car was responsible for his lapse from dignity. It came upon him from behind with a terrific screech, and my old friend jumped. Jumped fair behind a tree, round which his beard projected, wagging at a cloud of dust. "Hell and Tommy!" I heard him observe. "Hell and Tommy!" The remark summed up the situation, and the incident explains

The House of Dornell

why the old scratcher now works far up the bank.

From my bedroom window I have looked out at dewy dawn upon the scratchers. They do not disturb the tranquillity of the scene; there is nothing in their actions to suggest life's endless toil and endeavour, and their clothes are just the colour of withered leaves. At that time of the morning they are generally smoking pipes, and the smell of tobacco blends with the smell of earth as a sort of incense rising to salute the morn. I could envy that band of scratchers. In the midst of worry and disappointment I have envied them their peace. How pleasant it would be to exchange my lot for theirs, and to pass the days in gentle toil among the garden lawns and paths! To wield the toothless rake and stubbly broom; to watch the motor-cars go past; to feel interest in the movements of a cow,

The Scratcher

and to feel that here, amid the trees and dead leaves, I might be as far removed from the world and worldly affairs as a monk of old in a company of brethren, tilling an old, grey garden to the sound of an abbey bell.

XII

LITTLE CUPID

ON the top of the summer-house, he stands, Little Cupid made of lead. He has wings spread airily, a bow, and a quiver full of arrows at his back. He is a dainty little Cupid, a plump little Cupid, but dangerous, were he to swoop upon you from that perch of his. Lead is solid metal from which to mould a god of love, and I have sometimes wondered if a cynic fashioned him to point a moral, or to raise a sneer. A summer-house is suggestive of romance, and a little Cupid—But a true cynic would have modelled him in gold, which is heavier than lead, and shines more prettily.

Still, there he is, and his little, fat legs are solidly set on a round block of wood

Little Cupid

that crowns the hatch. He is very like The Baa-lamb, though it does not do to say so, and from the summer-house he looks straight down on Cairnan's yard.

Perhaps, on a quiet summer evening when Cairnan smokes his pipe, he glances up at Little Cupid and has—thoughts. Who knows? There may be another side to Cairnan's nature that is not wholly mechanical, and he may forget the dynamos just for half an hour. More probably, however, his mind is running on The Stink Machine, to remember which always induces some pensiveness, and Little Cupid, resembling The Baa-lamb as he does, naturally attracts his gaze. Cupid's arrow is aimed at Cairnan's eye; it recalls to his memory the model Blériot, and then he smiles, shaking his head at the little god. The summer-house has a strip of garden to itself, railed in by a rustic

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fence, and a flagged path leads to the door. Inside—well, now I think of it, I have never been inside the summer-house. The door is locked and the key is lost. Perhaps romance lies sleeping within, and Little Cupid on the roof is merely a sign of occupancy. And yet the summer-house, by itself, is not romantic, nor does it tempt romance by hiding shyly. It stands on a hill, and the long path up to it is bare of shelter. Besides the only window faces Cairnan's yard, and suggests dynamos rather than hearts. If ever two fond mortals want to sit within the summer-house at Dornell, they will have to find the key, seek it high and low, ask for it, and set the household speculating hopefully. No, Little Cupid is a sturdy guardian, and his arrows are pointed to defend his realm against the passion he symbolises. Give lovers the bosky shade of Tempe, where the burn

Little Cupid

laughs softly beneath the hazel thickets, the summer-house is not for such as they are.

It is a shameless thing to hoist love naked on a housetop, and only a Cupid made of lead could bear the indignity without a blush. This Little Cupid cannot blush—he does not want to blush—and the virtue of modesty is not in him. He is a self-satisfied fellow, nothing disturbs him, not even the birds when they perch upon his shoulder to preen their wings in mockery of his. In winter time the boys snowball him, in spring the scratchers come with rakes and brooms to tidy up his garden plot, and one year a man with a pot of paint climbed the thatch and painted his pedestal green. That was a man without a soul; he hung his cap on Cupid's head and called him Billy Button. Such indignities has Cupid to suffer; yet still the little wretch sub-

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limely poses, as though his chubby form were not of the same metal as the water-pipes.

I often wonder what the scratchers think of Little Cupid; whether to them his wings, bow and arrows convey a subtle meaning, or whether they regard him simply as a freakish ornament of questionable delicacy. In the garden are two grim statues of more than life-size, representing Scottish heroes, Bruce and Wallace, I believe, each in Highland costume, and each armed with a short, Roman sword. On their heads are Roman helmets, and they stand against a wall, side by side, threatening, huge, foolish. Their attitudes are paralytic, and their beards are carved scrupulously true to nature. The scratchers understand them, and appreciate the conscientious chiselling; but as for Cupid, I have my doubts. They probably think he would look brighter

Little Cupid

and better in a coat of good, white paint. As it is, he has some resemblance to a tomb-stone cherub—a cherub grown complete—and in a churchyard cherubs are always painted lead-colour. Little Cupid on the summer-house! What is your opinion of scratchers and the rest of us dull men upon the earth? You are contemptuous, I know, because you are a god and stand on a green pedestal; but would you like it better if we came to woo you in your bower? Or would you tumble through the thatch and break our heads? Some day, The Baa-lamb or The Beloved will find the key, and scandalise the old spiders and spinster wood-lice with their frolics in the summer-house. They will shout through the window to Cairnan, and Cairnan will imagine that Cupid has come to life, till he recognises The Baa-lamb. Then he will climb up the bank and have dirt thrown on his head. How would

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you like that, Little Cupid with the scornful brow?

There have been some sly jokes made about the summer-house; The Colonel, our old friend with the Victoria Cross, is facetious, once at least, during every visit he makes to Dornell, on the subject, and we have learned from him what a humorous thing it is to be in love. Love, according to The Colonel, is all kissing and cuddling in a summer-house. No wonder Cupid is scornful. The Colonel would degrade him to a vulgar level, and our Little Cupid is not vulgar, whatever else he may be. There is grace and airiness in his pose, a pert seductiveness in those naked limbs of his, and a sparkle of naughtiness all over him that is but thinly hid by his eternal affectation of indifference. They tell me that he came from Rome, from some old garden villa of the south, where the long, warm days are made for love

Little Cupid

and idleness. Here, down the bank below his summer-house, the trailing rose-sprays drop their petals on the grass; but Cupid curls a lip, even in the time of roses, for ours is but a chilly land to him, and our blood runs too calmly for the little boy of the ardent south.

How Bruce and Wallace must have resented the coming of this foreigner! I can see them, grimly ignoring him, pretending not to know that he was there, yet all the while acutely conscious of his horrid little bow and arrows. They grasped their Roman swords more stiffly, stood straighter against the wall, till their Roman helmets tilted over their eyes, and thus they have remained ever since; dignified, foolish, paralytic. Little Cupid has long ago given them up in despair, regarding them just as he regards some mortals who make a virtue of ignoring love, thinking them just as ridiculous. To lean

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against a wall and frown perpetually, to maintain a defensive attitude against all neighbours, and to hate him, seems pitiful behaviour to Cupid; he will not waste an arrow on Bruce or Wallace; he aims at Cairnan instead, whom he feels to be human.

I should sometimes like to know what opinion The Kind One has of Cupid, and whether he considers him beneath all serious thought. The Kind One may have left the fanciful idea of love behind when he took to brooding on sunsets from the lofty pine-woods. It may be to him something more than prettiness, something great and noble that has its origin in pain; and yet the scar he bears was made by an arrow, shot from a bow by the same fat imp we call Little Cupid, who, in spite of his youth and innocence, is much more dangerous than Bruce or Wallace with their frown and Roman swords. He

Little Cupid

is older too, far older. He has the gift of perpetual youth, that is all, and the mischief of a child, though his knowledge goes right back to the dim beginning of the world.

Love does not grow old. We grow old and grey in trying to curb his wilfulness, and sorrowful in trying to understand his ways, while he shoots arrows at us and laughs. He is a child and god in one. A child when we scold him and weep over his shortcomings, a god when he smites us with his arrows and brings us to earth helpless. But as god or child we continue to do him honour, and his form graces the tops of our summer-houses in the shape of a pretty boy. We want to propitiate the tyrant, but he sees through our attempts, and deceives us with a bearing of indifference. Then he hits us when we least expect it, and we go away to abuse him as a rascal.

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Little Cupid, Little Cupid on the summer-house! For what anguish are you not responsible? But still I keep a soft corner in my heart for you, godling with the chubby legs. I like to see you up there on your wooden pedestal, your wings outspread to catch the breeze, while your feet, so firmly planted, show that you never can fly from earth. You are always with us. When winter powders you with snow, or April brings the birds to perch upon your shoulder. I like to feel that you are there at all seasons, watching the deserted summer-house, till one of us unlocks the door.

XIII

THE DOGS OF DORNELL

DON is an Airdale terrier, and counts as not the least important inmate of The House of Dornell. On fine summer days he is generally to be found on the steps outside the front door, where he figures as a watch-dog endowed with the hospitable instincts of a fine old English gentleman. His aspect is rather encouraging than forbidding; he seems to invite rather than repel chance comers, and on this account he is a failure as a watch-dog, though as a host his conduct leaves nothing to be desired. He has a stump of a tail, which he twists sideways as he comes forward to do the honours of the house, and an expression of bland courtesy that is not spoilt when he hangs out his tongue.

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He is so free from all mistrust, that I have often wondered whether he would detect a robber, should one call. I can imagine Don trotting innocently at the heels of the man who has just filched the spoons, and I can see him wag his tail as the thief departs, unconscious, unsuspecting, hospitable to the last. No, as a watch-dog I fear that Don is a fraud.

As a sportsman, a companion, a delightful member of the household, he is all that a dog can be, and even the rabbits are not seriously flustered by his pursuit. If, from his place upon the steps, he sees a rabbit, he is after it like a flash; the sporting instincts within him are roused, he bays, yelps, and tears up the gravel with his feet. The rabbit seems bored, and lopes away with dignity to the nearest burrow, while Don, the murderous sportsman, turns a somersault across a wire fence. Then he returns, on three legs, blinking

The Dogs of Dornell

to the steps. He knows that he has made a foolish exhibition of himself, and that the rabbit is laughing at him; therefore he pretends to have been for a little stroll in the country, and to have returned because the weather is too warm for exercise. Only once have I seen him with a rabbit in his mouth, and then it was only the hind legs I saw for an instant—the hind legs of a baby rabbit disappearing down Don's red throat. The performance was crude, I thought, and Don's methods lacked refinement, especially when he chose my bed as a place in which to sleep off his debauch.

There is a matter-of-fact simplicity about this dog. He has no consciousness of doing wrong at any time, and he would be grieved were you to hint that he had committed a fault. He would complain to his master, who would most certainly take his part. Still, there are enough good

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qualities in Don to make him admirable. He is honest, and he is generous. He allows The Baa-lamb to share a room with him at night, and does not ask for more than half the bed, and when he comes to visit me in the morning he always apologises for lying on my chest. He says things with his tongue, just as human beings do, only he has to stick his tongue outside, so that its expression may be seen and understood.

The Master of the House owns Don, and to him the old dog is perfection. He holds that no animal on earth, and very few folk, can equal him in wisdom and nobility. He is jealous of a word against the old dog, and Don frankly acquiesces when pointed to as an example of all canine virtues. With half-closed eyes he poses as a living monument of spotless integrity.

But we cannot all be perfect, and the virtues of Don show up the flaws in

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Nikko's character by contrast. Nikko is a Japanese pug, the special torment of My Lady, who combs him every day and loves him just because he is a torment. His looks make him lovable, but if he had to depend on qualities of heart alone, I fear that we should style him an abomination. He is the sort of dog to steal chops from the larder, and bury them in sofa cushions, to attack other dogs, and then run yelping to his mistress for protection; the sort of dog to sit at an upper window and snarl at fox hounds. He loves his own stomach better than anything else in the world, and he cries when it is empty. Don has his regular meals, like a Christian gentleman, but Nikko has the cravings of a famished wolf. He prefers bits of stolen meat, raw with plenty of blood about them, but his proper diet is cold chicken. He eats his chicken to the last morsel, it is true, though all the time

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his mind is fixed on better things; on certain savoury garbage that lies buried in the garden, forbidden delicacies to be dug up and eaten when nobody is by.

At tea time there is always a rivalry between The Master of the House with "the old dog" and My Lady with Nikko. Each feels that the other's favourite is getting more than a fair share of bread and butter, and each accuses the other's dog of greed. Then the dogs have to be consoled with pretty speeches, till Don, who is not by nature emotional, becomes full of sentiment, and lays a paw upon his master's knee. Nikko scrambles for tit-bits. There is no silly sentiment about him, and his nobler self, if he has one, is swamped in an ignoble desire for cake.

Once there came a day of retribution for Nikko. He fell into the fountain among the gold-fish and water lilies. Greed was his undoing, and a notion to

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taste fish. He got a ducking instead of a meal, and a fright that was increased to blind terror when a gardener rescued him by the tail. Still, he remains a greedy dog, and if we would cure his vice, it behooves us to buy an alligator to live in the fountain where the gold-fish are.

Nikko is pampered and caressed, but the family's affection is centred on Don. Nikko keeps his heart in his stomach; Don's eyes reflect a better state of things within him. He sleeps with The Baa-lamb, and I have looked in to see both their heads on one pillow, Don with a stout foreleg across The Baa-lamb's chest. There is a perfect understanding between these two. The dog follows the boy with adoring gaze, and when The Baa-lamb takes his head and whispers in his ear, the magic of love makes Don comprehend. The black, wet nose is uplifted in reply, and he speaks through his eyes, swearing

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eternal fidelity in a glance. When The Baa-lamb is away, Don sleeps in the woodshed with the cats, an indignity he bears with philosophic calm. He knows that in a few weeks he will be rescued from such company, and that the civilised ease of a bed will be his again. Nikko sleeps on an eiderdown quilt; he is afraid of cats, especially at night.

Don and Nikko are sociable dogs; they frequent drawing-rooms and look on men and women as their natural companions. Not so Mr. Stinkins. Mr. Stinkins is a misanthrope, probably because he has got no tail, a retiring, moody hermit; a nervous old gentleman, whose sentiments must have been soured by a misfortune early in life. This dog belongs to Cynthia, and therefore he is a lucky dog, and I must do him the justice to say that he does seem less melancholy with her than with the rest of us. If we meet him alone with Cynthia

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he may be frisking in a temperate manner, but if anybody speaks to him, he immediately thinks of the place where his tail should be, and retires into gloomy aloofness. I believe Mr. Stinkins is Dutch. He formerly belonged to a lady in London, who used to take him for drives in the park with a pink bow under his chin. He probably grew weary then from too much ease and too wide an experience of the world, or his nature may have become permanently soured from having to wear a pink cravat. Now he lives in a house where there are other dogs, and children; noisy, healthy animals, who would tweak his tail, if he had one, and from whom the soul of Mr. Stinkins recoils. You may call him a good dog, a beautiful dog—a beast. He will only turn his back with a shiver of disgust, and if you offer him food, he seems to suspect poison in it.

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Cynthia is fond of him; she protects him from ridicule, and has a name for him that is not Mr. Stinkins. Anthony, she calls him; Mr. Anthony Stinkins is a compromise for her sake. I think he spends most of his day in Cynthia's room, for I have seen the end of his nose peering round the window curtain; but if he is addressed—by any name—he withdraws immediately. With dogs he is no more familiar than with human beings. If Don brushes against him he shrinks with nervous horror, and even Nikko, who can rouse most folk to a game, gets from Mr. Anthony Stinkins nothing more than a glance of loathing. Cynthia loves him because he is old and lonely; she loves The Kind One for the same reason, and me she loves because—well, I do not care why, so long as she loves me. Some persons are born to champion those the world derides; Cynthia is one of these, and her

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dear nature looks for no reward. It is enough that certain beings need championing; she moves to their support at once, whether the luckless one be dog or man. That is why I consider Mr. Anthony Stinkins a dog to be envied, in spite of his nerves.

Dogs and children! On the lawn beneath the cedar-trees I like to think of you. In the sultry afternoons, when tired of play, you come and squat about me. I make an excellent arm-chair, no doubt, and a pillow for your head, Beloved. The Beloved would lie still and talk, if the rest would let him—I wish they would, instead of shoving grass down his neck and mine. Don would sleep in the shade, were it not for Nikko. The only one of us at peace is Mr. Anthony Stinkins, protected by the arm of Cynthia, and soothed by her caress.

XIV

ROBERT

ROBERT belongs to the harmonious order of those who gain a wage by scratching; that is to say, he sweeps and weeds paths in the garden, and makes heaps of dead leaves for the wind to blow away. He might be styled King of Scratchers, or Deadleaf Emperor, for in his profession he stands pre-eminent, both as an artistic wielder of old rakes, and as a peerless simulator of industry. He is an elderly man; an old man, some folk might call him; but he owns neither to age nor to decrepitude, and his very gait is a defiance to time and the years that pull him down. He has a club-foot, which in walking gives his steps a peculiar flourish and a suggestion of triumphant progress. His fig-

Robert

ure is spare and monkey-like, his face brown and red and wrinkled, but he has a dignity that physical defects cannot mar, and a confidence in himself that makes him a rebel to authority. He is grandiloquent, ready to argue on the slightest provocation, and full of personal reminiscences, nicely flavoured to suit diverse tastes.

Robert was, in earlier life, a trainer of greyhounds, and his sporting instinct survives, bursting forth in shrill notes of criticism when he sees a farm dog course a rabbit down a hedgerow. He is an authority on every breed of dogs, and blind puppies are brought to him for judgment, and their fate hangs on his verdict. The heart of Robert is tender toward dogs of all degrees, and he holds little, blind pups in rough and knotty hands that seem to grow suddenly gentle at the touch of their warm helplessness. His blue eyes twinkle

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as he looks at them, and then he will relate the story of Benedick, the famous hound he saved, many years ago, from a watery death, and which lived to win silver cups and fame. If the owner of the pups be credulous, or of a sanguine nature, he may, perhaps, imagine Benedicks to lurk among his litter. If not—why, then, the horse-pond. But Robert feels he has acted the part of a just and merciful judge.

It is a change in life for a trainer of hounds to become a scratcher; but Robert looks on scratching as an amateurish sort of occupation for his declining years, an occupation more than a profession, and at Dornell we all understand this, and appreciate the spirit in which he consents to weed the avenue. Nobody gives orders to Robert; a hint is as far as any one may go; a hint subtly implying that without his care the place would run to rack and ruin. Robert believes himself to be the

Robert

prop and mainstay of the establishment, and his toil is sweetened by a consciousness of value to the landscape that each stroke imparts.

He likes to be near the gate and public road, where he can see the world pass, and lure acquaintances from their proper business to admire his work. He takes a pride in his work, and lingers over details with an artistic pleasure in effect, so that a day's labour is to him a sort of poem. He has a collection of tools, which he keeps in holes and corners, never where they should be kept, and sometimes strange discoveries are made of rusty implements grown over in the shrubs. They are Robert's hoes and rakes, put past with care for next year's weeding on the drive. I have an idea that he likes a mellow tone about his implements, and that the sight of new wood and iron offends a delicate sense within him. He feels that, like himself,

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their colour scheme should match the tint of withered leaves and twigs, and blend with their surroundings in shades of russet-brown and grey. It may be an artistic instinct that influences him to leave his tools about, or it may be pure obstinacy against the decrees of those who have provided tool-sheds.

With a little tin bucket and his hoe, Robert makes a great stir among the weeds, and he likes the avenue best, because from it he can run into the wood to empty his bucket, without being called upon to use a barrow. He hates wheelbarrows, as all true scratchers should, but he has even less patience with the merry wind, and abuses it for hunting leaves into the open from the cover of bushes where they lie unseen. He is an artist without doubt, and as a transformer of rough banks into smooth and gracious slopes he is unequalled. Summer or winter, rain or

Robert

shine, he is always to be found at the task of improving the landscape.

At times his occupation calls him down from the avenue to the shrubberies near the house, and here he is industrious to the sound of his own singing. He pipes in a high old voice as he sweeps, and always has an eye for possible company. If he can get an audience, even one small child, to listen while he talks, he is happy; and he can work and talk at the same time with a cunning that defies reproach. He trots about, ambles, canters, with that club-foot of his describing strange figures as he goes, and all the time he chatters like a jackdaw. He knows the history of many families and the history of their dogs, and what he does not know he supplies from fancy's store. His lying is said to be "notorious," but his presence of mind never deserts him. If he comes upon his master frowning at a gap in the laurels, or star-

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ing at a track through the ornamental shrubs, he will range up beside him full of specious innocence and surprise. He is the honest workman, the trusted servant, deploring other folks' wilful damage; the outraged artist lamenting vandalism. He is shrilly garrulous, righteously indignant. Some person has made these gaps and tracks, and Robert wishes he could catch him at it! He would be in no condition to make gaps after Robert had done with him; but that sort of person is most difficult to catch, working his wickedness, as he does, at dead of night. However, some day—Robert shakes his head with dark and meaning looks. He is unabashed by the twinkle of his own tin bucket at the end of a leafy tunnel through the pink azaleas.

But to see Robert work, really work, till the sweat pours down his face, one must wait for the winter and the bonfire

Robert

season. Then Robert sings his shrillest, hurries to and fro, and actually seeks a wheelbarrow. He collects a pile of rubbish, sticks, leaves, weeds, old flower-stems and faded garden stuff, till he has a mound of proper bulk for a roaring fire. He calls his fire "a roarer" and the clippings from the laurel shrubs make it crackle and blaze right handsomely. What a sight it is to see old Robert hopping round his fire! How grim his wrinkled face becomes as, with a pitchfork he flings on fresh fuel. He is like a quaint old demon, and might be roasting souls, instead of burning docks and nettles. The primitive man leaps up in him to meet the dancing flames; he is no longer an artist, but a crude, sweating man instinct with the spirit of destruction. If he had his way he would uproot the garden, and feed his roarer with our winter kale and broccoli. At such strenuous times his head is merely

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a peg on which to hang the singed remnants of a cap, which drops askew above one ear.

I have seen him in the dusk of a winter evening still busy among the flying sparks, and the red light throws up a goblin form against a background of dark shades. After school is over, little boys steal down from the village to roast potatoes in the feathery ash, and to assist Robert in his toil. Then there seems to be a band of goblins round the fire, and their high-pitched voices mingle with the crackle of the roarer. The village boys have but slight reverence for their elders, and get in Robert's way till he cuffs their ears; but even then they soon come back from flinging dirt at him out of the darkness, for the sheer delight of witnessing destruction and assisting it.

The glow can be seen far off, and the shapes of those who flit from light to

Robert

shadow as the veering breeze drives the hot smoke wisps in one direction or another, and their actions are clearly outlined. It makes me envious to see those boys plunging for the hot potatoes, and I feel again the smart of blistered fingers as they shake theirs yonder. Many years it is since I have eaten singed potatoes from the ashes of a fire, but the flavour is sharp upon my memory's palate, and still my nostrils hold the smell of smoke that clung to hair and garments all next day. Robert would be astonished, probably shocked, were I to bring my share of potatoes to roast, but The Baa-lamb and The Beloved will be home at Christmas time, and then for an ash-seasoned cooking at dusk!

A boy has all but tripped up old Robert; he has got his baked potato, and a cuff on the ear to boot. I wonder how much of envy and remembrance was in the mind of

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Robert when he gave that cuff, or whether he was but vindicating the dignity of age?

The leaping flames die down; there is no more rubbish left to burn, and Robert thinks of home and supper. He gets his jacket, and prepares to go, but just before he leaves, he flicks from the ashes the last two blackened potatoes for the urchin whose ears he has lately cuffed. It is a kindly touch to end the day. It makes me think of the little blind pups, and doubt the rigour of his hand on young human ears. He limps off with the boys at his heels, and long after their figures have melted in the gathering darkness, I can hear the clatter of their foot-falls, and the sound of laughter.

XV

THE VALE OF TEMPE

THE Vale of Tempe lies behind Dornell, and is sheltered by the pine-clad hill where The Kind One loves to wander. He seldom goes into Tempe; it is too calm a place for him, too suggestive of contentment with which his mind is not in tune, and the lights are not thrown in sharp contrasting bands, as among the pine-boles. But to a nature tolerably at ease Tempe is a spot of many charms, a spot to linger in and to enjoy. It has for me a special attraction when entered from the high track along the hill-face. The rough ground ends at Tempe; there are no grey, unclothed boulders, but every stone and tree-stump is green with moss, or buried in the fern. It is a dip into a softer world

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of undergrowths, a leafy hollow that changes its tints with the seasons. The pine-woods are changeless; Tempe is always changing, and each month brings something to adorn it, or takes away something that seems only to leave the rest more beautiful. As you come into it the path slopes rather steeply, and is fringed by sweeping bracken fronds that brush knee-high at every step, and hang in green or russet patches down the banks on both sides of the way. At the bottom of the slope the path widens out upon a little flat beside the burn and stepping-stones. Up and down the glen is a tangle of vegetation; whichever way you look are hawthorn bushes nearly covered up by twining honeysuckle, hazel clumps that shelter beds of fern and ivy, while among them are small open spaces that reflect the sky in spring when the hyacinths are in bloom. It is cool, sweet-smelling, secluded, and

The Vale of Tempe

the burn makes a ceaseless murmur through its length.

Further up the hills this same burn is a rushing gutter, but it sobers itself in Tempe and leaves off fretting over rocks to glide away beneath the dappled shade of copse-wood. The voice of the glen is a sleepy song; there is no sighing there as on the pine slopes, but only a contented murmuring in the leaves and flowing water. Yet, by glancing up, you can see the hills, and the silver flashing torrent that runs so smoothly here.

Tempe is unlike the other parts of Dornell; it is one memory, rather than a crowd of memories, and recollections of it blend together as a pleasant sort of picture that has no salient lines. Few people come to it. Boys, perhaps, in April after birds' nests, or a pair of lovers on a Sunday afternoon. The attraction of the place lies in its seclusion, and in a certain air

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of mystery that the sound of hidden water creates. One can go away to Tempe and lose the world for a time; steep the mind in hushed forgetfulness, or let imagination sport at will to the singing of the burn; and then return to find life full of sunshine and cheery bustle.

There are wood-nymphs in Tempe, or I dreamed of one seen only for an instant between tree-trunks. She fled so quickly that when, at the stepping-stones, I met My Lady, I could not be quite sure fancy had not played me a trick. My Lady says there are no wood-nymphs in Tempe, and laughs my vision into nothingness. I am compelled to believe her, but all the same, I have a hankering to meet my brown-eyed nymph once more. I wonder why she ran away? She mistook me for Pan, perhaps, although I only smoke a pipe.

Sometimes, on a still winter day, when Tempe holds the faintest mist, and the

The Vale of Tempe

brown leaves are sodden underfoot, you may hear a distant rumble and a crash. This is the noise of a great rock, loosened by the wet, making an avalanche of itself down the hillside through the pine-trees. Every winter some of the big rocks come tumbling from the heights, and many of the tree-trunks bear marks of scars where the flying mass has struck them. Blows like that make even a pine-tree shiver. Some of the rocks get lodged against the trees, and those that have fallen a long while ago are deeply sunk in the bark, and green with age. Others remain just balanced, and the temptation is always great to set them toppling with a push. It is a sort of fearful joy to see them bound away, and to listen to the splintering of brushwood in the valley far below.

But apart from artificial avalanches, the foresters' men are quite accustomed to the downward charge of boulders, and

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take cover when they hear a distant warning overhead. The hillside is so steep that a stone, once set rolling, gathers speed by the way, leaping higher among the tree-trunks, till at last it plunges into the thickets that fringe the lower slopes. If a stone falls conveniently, the foresters use it for a seat at dinner-time, and speculate between bites upon the fate of a man should he be caught by such a monster. It is only during winter that these avalanches occur; in the summer months you could sleep all day beneath the shadow of the rocks, and nothing worse would fall on you than the stigma of laziness, but there are always the grey stragglers among the pine stems, the boulders poised ready for descent, and the scars on bark or branches to remind you that peace here is not a lasting state.

No avalanches descend into the Vale of Tempe, no intrusive violence mars its

The Vale of Tempe

calm, and nothing falls there heavier than a twirling leaf, or snowflake. The noisiest thing is the burn, and its voice is musical, except in winter when the floods swell its murmur to a roar. But even a flood does not last long, and all the time it does last a chorus of protest swells up in Tempe. The swaying grasses are agitated on the banks, and the alder-trees stretch down vain branches to stem the rush. They seem to nod and argue with the water, but the burn is a self-willed thing, and spurns the branches till the storm is past. Then it smiles quite suddenly, like the brown eyes of a wood-nymph, and sings the glen to sleep.

The sea and the sky and the river may be blue, but the little burn in Tempe is always sparkling brown. It reminds me of some eyes I know, with their dancing lights and April changes, and it weeps, even as eyes weep, when the sorrowful seasons come upon it. In November

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when the sea-fog rolls inland, Tempe becomes a place of mourning, and every twig or bending grass-plume drops tears upon the burn's grey, saddened face. But this is a passing humour that few folk have seen, because on a November afternoon of fog the fireside is more attractive than a damp and weeping glen. Yet the same folk who shun Tempe in November are often those who miss its daybreak witchery in early spring, when each bud holds a dewdrop, and the burn is full of dimples round the stepping-tones. There is always a secret in the burn, and it is always laughing about it, or mocking those who try to find it out. Down by the stepping-stones the ripples are discreet and innocent; the burn tells nothing there in the open; but a little further on, where the bushes hide its course, it has a deal to say, if one could comprehend its language. It is a perverse trickle, a thing that will not

The Vale of Tempe

be understood, and like Little Cupid on the summer-house, it mocks at us who are so dull.

The bosky shade of Tempe is created for lovers; perhaps the burn reveals itself to them alone, and keeps its perverse moods for those who merely idle on its banks. Here in the wooded glen man by himself is an intruder; two, led by the spirit of romance, come down the path into a fairy-land that welcomes them.

If you follow the burn through Tempe it will bring you out at last in the pleasure grounds of Dornell, where man has asserted himself as the superior of nature. A retribution overtakes the burn, and it is forced to go decorously in harness. At one place they have made a cascade for it, and a pool where the water turns round and round; at another a bog-garden usurps its banks, and everywhere its course is hemmed in and twisted to suit the taste of

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man, the uncomprehending. There is a scornful look about the burn in the pleasure grounds. It winds in and out among the bamboo thickets, or is shaded by the large-leafed iris; but this is not Tempe, and where it is stemmed to make a lily-pond, the burn deposits mud. Below the cascade is a sort of glen; but the sides of it are smooth grass, and daffodils are not the hawthorn buds of Tempe. Sometimes the stream drifts a moment, pensive, but it has to do so many things—to leap, to spread itself out, to simulate wrath, to overcome obstacles placed across its path—that it has no leisure to be pensive, and can only hurry past to reach the big river, where it can go to sleep.

I love the pleasure grounds of Dornell, the lawns, the cedar-trees and the old-world garden; but the breath of Tempe comes down with the burn, and contrasts are not always good. If I had never seen

The Vale of Tempe

Tempe, the ornamental waters of the pleasure grounds might bring to me a sense of satisfaction. If I could forget Tempe, our fine cascade would fill me with delight, and the iris beds would seem a natural setting for the burn. But out beyond the shrubby policies, I have a vision of deep shades and wayward ripples, of a leafy solitude untouched by man, and then I hear, faint and alluring from the wilds, a sound of laughter, which is as a call to draw me up-stream to the valley in the hills.

XVI

COUSIN ANN

WHEN Cousin Ann comes to stay at Dornell, there is always a stir in the household, as upon the coming of royalty, and for a week before she arrives an air of preparation is noticeable all over the house. This is because Cousin Ann (she is never addressed without the cousinly prefix) is a great lady from the great world, whom it behoves us to honour. We are simple folk at Dornell, and we have an idea that Cousin Ann is rather formidable. She is stately in appearance, a trifle stout, perhaps, and seems to demand the best of everything by the very look of her. The softest arm-chair is hers by right, and her progress from one room to another is attended by a suite bearing

Cousin Ann

cushions. I believe she is My Lady's cousin, but we all call her Cousin Ann, and treat her with affectionate respect. She is a person whose standing in the world is so secure that she can dispense with the ordinary forms and phrases of civility, and be rude or charming as the humour takes her, which is very convenient for Cousin Ann. By virtue of her high estate she can do and say exactly what she likes; yawn when she feels tired, or praise us to our faces. In fact, she is a queen who can do no wrong, and we are as proud of her commendations as the loyalest subjects could be.

The house is hers while she remains in it, though she herself reminds us that My Lady is the hostess, and we are retainers, courtiers round her throne. Cousin Ann has her special room at Dornell; it is the room opposite that one belonging to The Colonel, and when he and she visit us at

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the same date, they meet on the landing about breakfast-time, and exchange civilities. The Colonel is on his best behaviour in the presence of Cousin Ann, and a shade more military than usual, as though he were wearing uniform with decorations to do her honour. He feels that he must look and act his best, and it is a feeling we all share when she appears among us. The Baa-lamb compares hands with The Beloved before meals, and white waistcoats of the richest are produced at dinner-time. Cynthia is combed and starched, till the thought of Cousin Ann weighs like an incubus upon her. She looks a Blessed Damozel, but she feels a demon underneath her spotless garb. Yet, I am certain Cousin Ann loves the children, although their customs sometimes shock her, and she is permanently convinced that a great mistake has been made in their upbringing. She tells My Lady this, and My

Cousin Ann

Lady meekly agrees, because she has never dared to contradict Cousin Ann in all her life. Nevertheless, I have seen Cousin Ann smile, and heard her chuckle, at some antic that should be, by rights, severely condemned. She has a delightful chuckle that shakes the golden drops in her ears, and when immediately afterwards she tries to frown, I feel that she is very human and lovable, in spite of her grand-world air.

I cannot, to tell the truth, understand why Cousin Ann should be so held in awe by her relations. There is nothing very daunting in her aspect, and if she speaks her mind, it is the privilege of age to give advice, and of kinsfolk to be frank. Of the cousinly state she does not take undue advantage, but she has a high sense of duty, apart from the idea of relationship, which a strain of humour keeps from growing irksome. The senses of duty and

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humour struggling together make her seem at times unsympathetic, for to laugh in the wrong place is a serious fault in Cousin Ann's opinion.

My Lady is always on the defensive when she thinks the children are being criticised, and her anxiety on their account blinds her to the underlying tenderness of Cousin Ann's remarks. And yet she knows that Cousin Ann is kind, and that she gives the children splendid gifts at Christmas. Everybody stands a little in awe of her, and does his best to please her, which is not difficult, because our great lady is really very simple. Childish games with letters amuse her, a rubber of whist for love, or a drive to nowhere and back of an afternoon. She is fond of a little company, too, but mighty scornful of our dinner parties, so that one effort, at least, is spared My Lady, who need not dine the neighbourhood for the sake of

Cousin Ann

pleasing Cousin Ann. Cousin Ann prefers a quiet rubber with The Colonel for a partner, or a round game with the children before bed.

It is a sad fact, but a true one, that The Colonel and Cousin Ann are sometimes frivolous together, and set the younger ones among us a bad example. A bad example, do I say? It is rather an edifying example of how the intercourse between man and woman may be rendered at once playful and dignified. Flirtation in their case is shorn of all vulgarity, and their grey heads impart an air of old-fashioned gallantry to the scene, which is becoming. They seem a piece with the china rose-bowls, and the odour of pot-pourri is their natural atmosphere. The Colonel has many old-world instincts, which blossom forth when Cousin Ann is there, and his use of bows and compliments is quite to her taste. They sit opposite each other

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in arm-chairs, bowing, smiling and exchanging rapier thrusts of very polished wit, till The Colonel chokes on a bon-mot and gasps for breath. Both he and she are deaf, but as neither will own to the fact there is sometimes vast confusion in their intercourse. But always politeness; that never fails, and their dignity is such that we dare hardly smile.

And it is not safe to smile when speaking to The Colonel about Cousin Ann, because he has a great respect for her, esteem he calls it, and would resent the least approach to flippancy at her expense. A monstrous pleasant woman, she is to him, and she admits The Colonel to be a most entertaining man.

Cynthia bewilders her cousin. She seems to be in so many places at once, and the effect she produces is rather like that of a gusty wind. Breeziness is a quality Cousin Ann does not appreciate, especially

Cousin Ann

in little girls, and she instinctively holds on her cap when Cynthia enters the room. It was not the custom for young ladies to be breezy when Cousin Ann was a girl, or to ruffle the air of a drawing-room with flying skirts. Little girls should be seen and not heard. Excellent precept! But Cynthia is both seen and heard in a variety of places, and with such rapidity of change as to make her seem ubiquitous. It is very upsetting for elderly ladies of strict views on propriety, but in spite of her faults, Cynthia has found favour in the eyes of her cousin, and besides a prayer-book and hymnal bound in Russia leather, Cousin Ann has given her a turquoise pendant. It was to have been a garnet brooch, but it seemed a pity to break the set, so Cousin Ann has kept her garnets as a future legacy for a god-child.

Cynthia hates being asked Bible ques-

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tions on a Sunday afternoon, and regards many of Cousin Ann's most cherished convictions as mere whims of a vexatious character, but for one reason she forgives all else. Cousin Ann is kind to Mr. Stinkins, the dog misanthrope, the tailless object of Cynthia's love, and what is more Mr. Stinkins responds. He appreciates dignity, and stately movements do not fluster him. He will wag himself when Cousin Ann speaks to him, and he always takes care not to sit on her dress. Cousin Ann calls him a nice dog, a very nice dog, which makes Cynthia blush from gratitude. Indeed she would be altogether fond of Cousin Ann, were it not for the latter's prejudice against The Kind One, whom she treats with extraordinary incivility. The harmless, mooning Kind One; the frequenter of pine-woods; the smoker of innumerable pipes; it is strange how he has fallen into disgrace. Cousin

Cousin Ann

Ann becomes irritable at the very smell of his tobacco, although she does not object to smoking in others, and when he speaks to her she sniffs, and gives him tart replies. He is a polite creature, and the conduct of Cousin Ann pains him, so that he looks at her gently and sighs. That annoys her more than anything. She shuts up her lips and withdraws into her grandest, haughtiest manner; but whenever she sees him again she forgets to be grand, relapsing at once into human, palpable displeasure. The Kind One is, as it were, a haunting plague from which her life is never free, and she cannot keep from thinking of, or talking about, him. She pulls his character to pieces before My Lady, and deprecates the very qualities we like in him; in fact she goes out of her way to show that, whatever others may believe, The Kind One is, in truth, unworthy of our pity. My Lady says nothing in reply,

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because she does not agree with Cousin Ann, and because she shrinks from useless argument. Her face, however, is an index to her thoughts, and at the first chance she escapes, runs away, and leaves Cousin Ann shaking her earrings over other people's folly.

One of the little boys at Miss Moreland's school is a godson of Cousin Ann, who sometimes has him to Dornell for an afternoon, or goes to visit him at the white school-house, where she can also enjoy a long and confidential talk with Miss Moreland. These are occasions of state in the lives of Miss Moreland and Mary McKie, when the china vases are filled with flowers, and all the home-made cordials appear with labels on the bottles, which adds considerably to their medicinal aspect. Cousin Ann refuses cordials, but she is very gracious to Mary McKie, so that the grim handmaid almost forgives

Cousin Ann

her scorning of the currant-wine. What Miss Moreland and Cousin Ann talk about, I do not know; the pale godson cannot always suffice as a subject for conversation, and I often puzzle myself in thinking of a common interest, which could appeal to both of them, and keep them busy in talk for hours at a time. Cousin Ann is fond of laying down the law to us, and we take her judgments meekly; but Miss Moreland is afraid of no one, and would never stoop to propitiate her visitor by polite acquiescence in views with which she disagreed. Then Miss Moreland can always appeal to Mary McKie for support, and Mary would perjure her soul for the sake of loyalty. Against the combined forces of mistress and maid, Cousin Ann would find it difficult to contend; so, on the whole, I am inclined to think that she is humble with Miss Moreland as with no one else, and goes to the school-house

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to renew her memories of childhood in an atmosphere she seldom feels elsewhere.

At all events, there is a noticeable change in Cousin Ann when she returns from such a visit; a milder bearing for a while, a disposition to regard us all with softened looks, and to sigh when she meets the children. These symptoms are apt to embarrass us, they are so foreign to Cousin Ann; but they soon pass, and it is only needful that The Kind One should appear, to bring back again the well-known manner and the familiar atmosphere we breathe when she is present.

XVII

HABITS AND CUSTOMS

WE are said to be creatures of habit; that is, we live by rule of thumb for our own convenience, and for the convenience of other folk. Originality is never looked upon with eyes quite friendly by mankind in general, because the original temperament is forever interfering with the ruled course of ordinary lives. It would not signify if such a temperament moved only the possessor of it to cut capers away from the beaten track. It might be amusing to watch him capering; but unfortunately original impulse is very much like a stone dropped in the rut of our progress, and is apt to cause a jolt, if it does not quite upset us.

At Dornell we regard with suspicion

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the appearance of a new habit, because we are afraid that it heralds a burst of originality, and because we have suffered from such outbursts in the past. A trifling habit unchecked, may grow into a custom, a firmly-established thing, an inconvenient excrescence on the highway of our lives. Therefore we are not allowed to assert our individuality by means of habits peculiar to ourselves, and all our customs are smoothed level, so that the wheels of life may roll over them without a jar.

Habits and customs are related to one another, and yet there is a marked difference in the treatment accorded to each; customs being respectable through antiquity, habits generally disreputable from associations. Thus it is a recognised custom that the boys should go to tea with Cairnan on the last Sunday of the holidays, but they may not eat cheese with a knife as he does. Custom in the house of Cair-

Habits and Customs

nan ranks as a habit to be checked at Dornell. I confess to being perplexed, sometimes, among the fine distinctions between customs and habits, and to my mind the knife and cheese habit might better be described as a dangerous innovation. But even harmless variations in our methods of conducting life are not encouraged. We are conservative in all our ideas, and for every situation there is a correct form of procedure, a certain etiquette to be observed that ought not to be varied. There is a proper ceremony for the first evening when the boys return from school, particular acts and phrases that always mark these occasions, and the bringing in of a single new incident would savour of revolution. The effect we wish to produce is that of loving welcome; the effect we do produce is that of receiving voyagers from an expedition full of hardships and privations. We feed them as we would revive sailors

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taken from a drifting raft in mid-ocean. It is tacitly conceded that the boys have suffered in some dim and nameless way, and we give ourselves the air of rescuers with a nice mixture of joy and sympathy. The boys are perfectly happy at school, but, like dogs, they respond to our compassionate reception, and are pleased to be called poor things. The meal provided for them is accepted as a just recompense after much starvation.

Customs extend all through the holidays, time-honoured customs that the coming of The Stink Machine upset most woefully. It is a malodorous innovation, a disturbing element in the midst of our peaceful domain; but we are growing used to it, and soon shall lose the inclination to run side-long into bushes when we hear it snorting up the drive. Some day The Stink Machine will rank among our most venerable institutions, the smell of it will blend naturally

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with the perfumes of the garden, and its snorting with the murmur of the wind through the pine-trees. In the meanwhile we have other institutions that not even a motor-bicycle can destroy, and all our carefully preserved customs seem to culminate on the last Sunday of the holidays in a sort of pageant, or procession, of domestic rites. On that day the boys belong to their father, who takes them away from the family and talks to them behind closed doors. The thought of leaving home depresses The Baa-lamb and The Beloved, so that they are in trim to hear a lecture, and words seem to sink deep then, as they never do at other seasons. Reports from school are brought out and read to them, with comments, and The Baa-lamb sighs to think that just those subjects for which he has least aptitude are the ones his father appreciates most. The Beloved cannot be criticised too freely. The process would

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introduce an atmosphere of real grief, and an improving discourse would be ruined by the need to comfort him. It is a solemn interview while it lasts, but afterwards comes relaxation in the form of tea with Cairnan. Cairnan has a very soft heart toward little boys who are going back to school, and he is one of those rare persons who can sympathise without causing one to feel foolish. There is nothing mawkish about Cairnan, and as a host he has a delightful way of making himself a butt for laughter by courting accidents and greeting them with innocent surprise. I have an idea he plans these accidents long before his tea-party, and that the mishaps with kettle or eggs have been rehearsed in private. The same mishaps have been repeated many times; they are a part of Cairnan's entertainment, and like the familiar clown jests of our childhood, they preserve an everlasting virtue of mirth.

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To meet again a well-known jest is to recognise an old friend whom we wish to stay unchanged, so that we may never miss the homely comfort of his familiar talk. Change comes in spite of us, but while we can we stick to those customs that have grown pleasant to us from long association. It is enough to know that such a thing as change exists, and that it works some alteration in us year by year, but we do not seek it, or try to hasten its coming here at Dornell. The notion of growing up is sad when we see *The Beloved*; the notion of growing old is sadder when we think of ourselves; but all the same we labour for the future by pulling weeds in the garden, or uprooting evil habits from our lives.

Bad habits spring as naturally as weeds. Goodness never becomes a habit, but is a constant struggle to maintain an all-round excellence, which if attained would

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mean great dulness in a human being, just as excessive neatness takes away some charm from an old garden. The chief reason for objecting to habits is that they generally point to moral slackness in one direction or another, and convenience has nothing to do with their right or wrong aspect in the eyes of authority. Thus The Baa-lamb is not allowed to lick his thumb when turning over a page, although his staple literature consists of catalogues from the manufacturers of Stink Machines, which are always printed on such thin paper that a wet thumb is of the greatest assistance in getting at their contents. With a wet thumb The Baa-lamb and Cairnan gather information swiftly, but even as a time-saving device, or short cut to knowledge, the practice is condemned. It is said to give a bad impression, and to leave one.

Nothing is so annoying as to have our most convenient practices condemned as

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bad habits; but there is consolation in the fact that those who correct us are often worse offenders than ourselves. The Kind One sets a good example by correcting nobody, and that is one of the reasons why his company is soothing. When Cousin Ann asks him how he can permit the children to violate good manners in the way he does, he remarks that it is all right, which irritates Cousin Ann considerably. It would be a case of the pot calling the kettle black, he thinks, but the duty of posing as a censor is pointed out to him so often that he has twinges of conscience whenever Cousin Ann finds him with the children. I suffer in a like manner, for Cousin Ann reproves me just as she reproves The Kind One, and I dare not tell her that the habit of fault-finding is the worst a man or woman can contract.

But after all, what does it matter? The ways we have please us, and they are very

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innocent. If I once introduced bad habits, they have become good customs now, and the very bad ones, such as idling away a summer afternoon beneath the trees, or being late for prayers, I have kept entirely to myself. Yes, Cousin Ann. Shake your head at me as you will; it matters not. Some day you will, perhaps, read this book, and looking back at Dornell and us, as we were when you tried so hard to cure our faults, you will see the very things of which you most disapproved through the same golden haze that falls between my eyes and the past, so that they will appear beautiful as virtues.

XVIII

MYSTERIES

LIFE would be nothing without its mysteries; little or great, they form the spice of existence, the foundation and essence of romance. There are no dark secrets connected with Dornell; not even the mystery of a ghost, and the shapes of memory that our eyes create are homely, not fantastic. Still, we have some mysteries among ourselves, things that keep us on the alert, like terriers, to sniff out what one member of the family hides from another.

Some of these are legitimate secrets, which we expect toward the season of Christmas, or in the neighbourhood of a birthday. The treasure-cupboard holds numerous tokens of such guarded mysteries that were burdens on the mind be-

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fore the joyful moment of revelation. They were recognised secrets, privileged bits of deception, bursting from their hiding-places to make a grand surprise on anniversaries. Cynthia's kettle-holder is a memorable example. It was a secret for many weeks before one Christmas, even after some of us had sat upon the needle, and when we raked it out from arm-chair seats we still pretended not to be aware of it. A piece of tapestry it was said to be, a counterpane, a chest-protector; anything but the kettle-holder that its shape proclaimed. It was one of the finest secrets possible, and a monument to mark the dulness of our intellects.

The boys possess an advantage over Cynthia in the matter of secrets. They can make their surprises at school, without fear of having them prematurely revealed, and their minds are thus free to concoct artistic ways of presentation, and novel

Mysteries

hiding-places where their gifts will be discovered unexpectedly. The Baa-lamb put the model of a brass screw among cigars in a box. It was intended to surprise his father, and the result quite came up to expectation. On Christmas Day, we look for tokens of good-will among our clothes, under our plates, or in our hats. To present their offerings thus saves the boys the least suspicion of sentiment and the embarrassment of thanks.

These mysteries form a class by themselves, and are sustained with right good will by everybody. They require some small external help to make them a success, a blindness now and then, a touch of dramatic feeling at the right moment to crown the enterprise. But other mysteries there are that have not an aspect so jocund, and about which we speculate in our private hearts with a frowning brow and real perplexity. These are riddles that

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try our patience, and that time alone can solve. Nearly every one of us has a little personal mystery, a spice to make us interesting, a problem to render us vexatious. My Lady holds more secrets in her keeping than any one I know. It comes naturally to tell her what we strive to hide from others, and she never shows undue responsiveness, even when a tale has touched her heart. She has the quality that goes to make a true confidant: the gift for receiving much and showing little. We know that our secrets are safe with her, and if she is silent while we babble them we are still sure she comprehends. To read between the lines, to fill in blank pauses correctly, is a special gift that belongs to her, and makes just the confidant we need.

Yet she can laugh at fancies. At my vision of a wood-nymph in Tempe, for example, although I can see that she is

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not quite easy in this attitude. She slips away from the subject, as though I had touched upon a secret of her own. The mystery she loves best is the romantic one concerning The Kind One's life, and that is why she feels distressed when Cousin Ann would strip it of all beauty and render it a naked, foolish thing. But then again, Cousin Ann has her secrets. She has never told us why a visit to Miss Moreland should send her back so chastened in spirit, or what she thinks of when the pensive moods are on her. If you asked, she would tell you that all secrets were wrong, and that we should hide nothing, especially from our nearest relatives. This may be, for all I know, an invitation; but nobody would confide in Cousin Ann, because her sense of duty and right would surely compel her to speak candidly. She would take a common-sense view of a situation, and quote the Bible against vain

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imaginings. A wood-nymph in Tempe might savour of human naughtiness to her, and she might put a concrete form of evil upon a pretty fancy. Spirits with her are all angels—or devils—and the flitting shapes we spy in woods are but heathen notions borrowed from mythology. Little Cupid on the summer-house is merely a leaden ornament to her, the significance of Cupid a theme on which she will not dwell. Therefore I never talk to Cousin Ann about the pagan fancies that delight me in the garden, nor do I ask her to share my dreams by the burn-side in Tempe. With My Lady it is different. She knows that I have clothed Dornell with whimsical conceits, and that all kinds of strange and mystic things lurk in the thickets where the stream descends; but if she thinks me foolish, she never tries to drag my mysteries to the light or strip them of romance.

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Tempe is the one exception. She takes pains to scatter my fancies there; and yet Tempe draws her as it draws me, so that we often meet beside the stepping-stones, or on the path among the bracken. You can walk to Miss Moreland's school that way, and when I meet her, it is always to Miss Moreland's that My Lady has been. The Sunday visits are being dropped, and she goes alone through Tempe, or in company with Cousin Ann. Another mystery here, surely, with Miss Moreland's white house as a centre. There seems to be a subtle spell that attracts My Lady and Cousin Ann to Miss Moreland's dwelling, and the circumstance puzzles me, because they are both so different, and Miss Moreland is so unlike either of them. This is a problem that I would willingly solve, but no enlightenment comes to me, since My Lady will not even speak of Tempe. It seems that Dornell is gathering to itself

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new associations that are not all of peace. Something in the air suggests changes, and I dread change in this quiet haunt of mine. But time has a wonderful power to mellow and beautify, and perhaps the added memories will prove not less sweet than those I dream of now.

The thought of mysteries sets me speculating. Has Cairnan secrets that he guards? Or the scratchers in their leafy walks? Robert, I know, cherishes many hidden things; but they are mostly of iron or wood, and a heap of rusty tools lends rather a prose effect than one of mystery to the dim recesses of a laurel brake. The only mysteries Cairnan cultivates are those connected with Stink Machines, and these suffice his needs. But you can always break up a Stink Machine with a sledge-hammer, if its waywardness grows too intricate, or you can unscrew it and examine its inside; but with these

Mysteries

human mysteries time and patient waiting alone can solve them. Time and patience; of the one I have an ample store, of the other I learn from Cairnan. Still, although I am resigned to the conduct of my friends, I hate to be baffled by that little burn in Tempe. It knows exactly why My Lady takes the path by the stepping-stones when on her way to see Miss Moreland, and it has seen others in the glen who hide from me. It dives into the undergrowth to laugh, and when I wade upstream, through the hole in the garden wall, and into the dusky tunnel of its course, it receives me coldly. The next time I shall take Cynthia with me, and we will violate the sanctuary with laughter of our own.

I sometimes wish that I were like The Kind One. The unexplained goings to and fro disturb him not at all. The pine slopes are mystery enough for him, and

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all that puzzles his brain is why Cousin Ann should treat him with such severity. I am jealous of The Kind One, because he is robbing me of Cynthia. She, little feminine wretch, has scented out a story of love, and being calmly engaged to me is not enough for her. The condition has lost piquancy through long establishment, and The Kind One's state has for her the charm of novelty. She even deserts the dogs, which are not taken to the woods when she and The Kind One go rambling, because repeated callings to errant Mr. Stinkins would interfere with the spirit of their intercourse. The dogs remain with me, puzzled as I am, and resenting what they cannot understand. The Beloved, the dogs, and I: we make a company of aggrieved spirits. The Beloved is hurt because The Baa-lamb, his close companion, has gone scouring the roads on a Stink Machine, leaving him behind, the

Mysteries

dogs are offended on account of Cynthia's neglect, and I am disconsolate because everybody seems to have a secret except myself. Indeed I could find it in my heart to turn misanthrope, like Mr. Stinkins, and only his entire unapproachability prevents me from seeking his right paw of fellowship. Mr. Stinkins will have none of me; the others have their own affairs. Come then, Beloved, let us walk down to Cairnan's yard and sit in his workshop a while. He will tell us the story of the careless bombardier, a simple tale, and one easily comprehended.

XIX

CUPID TRIUMPHANT

IT came upon us as no very great surprise when My Lady mentioned that Miss Moreland had an authoress staying with her. It seemed natural and in keeping with the scholastic atmosphere of the white house, and the name called up a dull vision of one with shortish hair and spectacles, an intellectual being remote from our sphere. For some reason or other, we connected her with the class of book that combines amusement with instruction, and made her in our minds a reincarnation of Miss Edgeworth. We could not connect her with anything so light as fiction, because she dwelt in the very citadel of learning, and under the

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eye of Miss Moreland who condemns novels.

Cousin Ann claimed her as a friend, too, and spoke of her as a good companion for the pale godson, which confirmed our notion that the authoress must be both elderly and prim. She had evidently impressed Cousin Ann, and touched her, for we traced the subduing effects of a visit to the white house to the authoress, and not to Miss Moreland's influence. A friend of Cousin Ann could never be very interesting, we thought, and it was only when My Lady began to speak of her, and of having asked her to Dornell, that my curiosity was roused. An authoress, even a reincarnation of Miss Edgeworth, cannot be a specially formidable guest to entertain, and yet My Lady was plainly disturbed in her mind, and anxious at the prospect. A sort of shyness seemed to affect her, and as My Lady is well enough

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informed to hold her own with most authoresses, I wondered what the reason could be. I smelt a mystery, and altogether failed to solve it when driven to ask questions. I was told to wait, and so I waited, cynically as one who expects nothing.

But if My Lady shunned talk of Miss Moreland's visitor, Cousin Ann flaunted her before us all day: as an example of industry, as her friend, and as a protégée whom she regarded as her own through right of discovery. She used to talk about her when The Kind One was in the room, and he was always sympathetic, instead of appearing struck by his own imperfections, or contrasting them dismally with a woman's excellence. Cousin Ann could make nothing of The Kind One. He was ready to admire the authoress when her virtues were pointed out to him, and to smile, or sigh with charming grace; but it

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never entered his head that Cousin Ann was pointing out an example for his benefit or confusion, and his serenity was never ruffled. The only person who seemed distressed was My Lady. When Cousin Ann approached her favourite topic, she would shoot a quick glance at The Kind One, and then fix her eyes upon the floor, while a sudden colour rose in her face. I was sure there was some mystery connected with this writing woman, and I came near to guessing the truth, once or twice, though My Lady would tell me nothing.

Miss Moreland's guest was something else than a fine example of literary devotion in My Lady's eyes; something in the nature of a romance heroine, whom she was shy of mentioning in ordinary talk. By degrees I came to identify the authoress with my wood-nymph in Tempe, and at once she changed her form from elderly

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sedateness to a lively and becoming one of youth. My Lady had met a pretty girl in Tempe, an authoress of the brightest fiction, and had straightway plunged into a romantic sort of friendship, worthy of Cynthia, rather than her mother. That is the conclusion I came to, and My Lady's shyness I put down to a kind of shame she felt at having been betrayed into an impulse so juvenile. She wanted The Kind One, her other embodiment of romance, to meet the authoress, and therefore she had asked her to Dornell. I came near to guessing the truth, as I have said before.

The Baa-lamb and The Beloved looked upon the visit of an authoress as a distinct infringement of their holiday rights; because folk who make books stand in the same class as schoolmasters, and professors, whose proper place is in a lecture-room. The Stink Machine is a boon to

Cupid Triumphant

The Baa-lamb on an emergency; he can fly away on it, whereas The Beloved and Cynthia can only hide, which they promised to do when the authoress came to tea. The Kind One said he would take Cynthia with him, to the pine-woods; but My Lady, with a look that apologised for the untruth, told him that Cynthia was already engaged to go with me. I met My Lady's eyes fairly, and then, The Kind One having sauntered off, she put her hands on mine, and gave me the whole truth. I had almost guessed it, but was wrong in one particular. The Kind One and this girl who wrote books had met before, and their lives were like those of Dick and Maisie in "The Light that Failed." My Lady, knowing two stories, had joined one with the other, and now had intervened to bring about a happy ending. It was an idea worthy of her, an experiment which few besides herself

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would have dared to try, and if Maisie helped her it was done adroitly, so that she never knew. As for me, when she explained the wonderful secret, I could only press her hands and vow she was the dearest woman in the world.

Cynthia had not been for a walk with me for some time. Her attention had been altogether given to The Kind One, and now that we were together she assumed an injured air, as though I, not she, had been unfaithful. She firmly believed The Kind One to be a victim, and that even then he was pining for her company, of which she unwillingly deprived him. However, it was not her fault, and after a while she found my society a relief from a prolonged course of pine-woods and recitation. At any rate, she cheered up and we made a holiday of it with our tea in a basket between us. We came into Tempe by a round-about track, and pad-

Cupid Triumphant

dled in the burn at the stepping-stones. I could have vowed that the burn was still laughing at me, but the secret was out now, and Cynthia's bare feet set the ripples dancing to a new tune. Later on, we climbed the path that leads on to the hillside above Dornell, and in the shadow of a big rock we sat down to eat our tea. No picnic can have a right flavour without a fire, so I gathered sticks and made a smoky blaze to please Cynthia, who had learned to claim service from men-folk since last we went picnicking together. It was a feminine development I charged to the influence of The Kind One.

The spot we had chosen for our encampment was high up the hill, where we could look over the pine-tops, like an undulating sea of green, to the river and the far-off mountains, just beginning to turn dark against an evening sky. Almost at our feet lay Dornell, and a peep of its chim-

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neys set me speculating. The Kind One had met the authoress by now, and recognised her to his joy or sorrow. Perhaps he was on his way to the pine-woods in despair, having dashed a romance to atoms, and would shortly burst upon Cynthia and me to the ruin of our pleasant outing. Such an event would have been quite in keeping with what we knew of The Kind One's ways, and when I thought of all My Lady's planning for his good, I marked a stone to roll upon his head should he appear.

Cynthia, as we sat, grew pensive; the place held memories for her, and I felt she regarded me as an intruder, in spite of my diligence in tending a smoky fire. That smoke rose in a thin column between us, making a sort of dividing curtain, through which our faces appeared to one another dim and indistinct. I knew that Cynthia's mind was wandering in the same direction

Cupid Triumphant

as my own, and yet she would have denied it stoutly, had I taxed her with a longing for The Kind One. We drank our tea—or milk, was it?—in silence, and by and by the west began to glow with red, which deepened as the sun dropped down, till the spirit of evening spread abroad among the pine-stems, and over the still landscape. Its influence touched both of us where we sat, high above the world on the crest of the hill. A squirrel came to investigate our presence, but Cynthia made no move; a hare loped across the path, and still she took no notice. Then, just to try her, I began a line from “The Blessed Damozel.” Cynthia reminds me, sometimes, of The Blessed Damozel, and the poem is a favourite one of hers. She was taught it by The Kind One, verse by verse, on these very pine slopes, and I made my voice like his when he recites. One line was quite enough. Cynthia

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jumped up and the spell of her musing was broken.

Whatever had happened at Dornell was past by now, for it was late, and I felt that we might safely return home; so, after failing to take Cynthia's hand, I descended the hill in silence by her side. As we went along, a rising anger against The Kind One took possession of me, because it seemed impossible that My Lady's romantic venture had proved a success. She was dealing with a mule, not a man, and one could not even be sure that he would suffer properly. He deserved to suffer both for his ingratitude to My Lady, and for having estranged Cynthia from me. I felt that Cousin Ann was right in her opinion of him, and wondered how we could have disagreed with her. He was probably incapable of strong feeling, an inveterate idler on whom sympathy and help were totally wasted. My Lady,

Cupid Triumphant

Maisie, Cynthia were all too good for him. He was no use to anybody; he was an impostor, a——

Suddenly I was roused by Cynthia's hand in mine, and we stopped. Not a moment too soon, for there below us, only a few yards distant, stood The Kind One. In a ray of sunlight that fell slantingly between the tree-trunks he stood, clothed in a sort of superhuman glory, and his arm was round the waist of a woman.

Cynthia pulled me away, and as we took a circuitous route for home she still held my hand. Soon we came into Tempe, and the burn called us to follow it, called and laughed, and I laughed too, because the world seemed a merry place. Cynthia looked at me reproachfully; I had forgotten a duty; but remembering it then, I kissed her.

XX

FAREWELL

So, Little Cupid, you have triumphed. After a long time of waiting on your perch above the summer-house, you at last see two smitten victims at your feet. Love has a part in every story; even these simple annals of Dornell are incomplete without the intervention of the love-god and his arrows. Cupid takes the whole credit of a happy ending to himself, and I can see he does by the extra touch of vanity his pose betrays, although he still pretends to take a careful aim at somebody in Cairnan's yard. What a transparent bit of affectation, Little Cupid! You cannot mislead us, and you know quite well that Cairnan is nothing to you.

Farewell

It is only your perversity that makes you turn your back on us now, just as though you had not faced about for a shot when you thought nobody was looking. You hit The Kind One on a summer afternoon, and finished him off, as a hunter does a wounded buck that he has tracked for many hours.

But all the same, the pine-woods, not your summer-house, saw the end, and while a pair of lovers stood upon the hillside, the scratchers were weeding the plots about your own domain. Yes, you may plume yourself as you will, but the summer-house has lost its reputation, and you remain a guardian of emptiness. Yet we owe you a debt of gratitude, little god, for bringing all things straight, and for adding one more link to the golden chain of memories about Dornell. You scorn us, but you are a benefactor, a naked godling of infinite power, who has caused

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a cloud to roll away from the blue sky, and the world to smile again. Wherefore we thank you, Cupid.

My Lady is never tired of going through the history of her plots and plans for the happiness of others. She likes to take us apart, one by one, and to relate the incidents of this, her great romance, with a gentle triumph that wins all our hearts. She has been Cupid's ally from beginning to end, and I would rather give the praise to her than to the supercilious imp upon the summer-house. A little love-making imparts a wonderful spice to existence, and the folk at Dornell have a new interest in their lives. Maisie, the authoress, has joined our circle of intimate friends, and whenever she appears a flutter manifests itself among the least impressionable of them. She is regarded as a child who has done well, and the tender feeling we have for her is shown in gifts of flowers, so

Farewell

that she always has a fresh blossom pinned in her dress.

Cousin Ann was inclined to retire upon her dignity, at first, and to mount a lofty platform of state as a sort of salve to her consciousness of having been woefully blind. She does not like to own that all this has come upon her as a vast surprise, nor does she altogether relish being ousted from a front-rank place; but the influence of joy was too much for her, and so she came down again, shaking her head at our weakness, and her own. The Colonel, too, was not quite satisfied when next he visited us. Love to him is all kissing and cooing in a summer-house, and the fact that these lovers seemed never to kiss or coo, added to the fact that the summer-house key was lost, disordered his ideas for a while. But it is not in his nature to allow his jests to be spoilt by the inconsistent behaviour of his friends, and before long he had new jokes

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to chuckle over, which pleased him every bit as well as the old ones, and which The Kind One finds just as embarrassing.

Cairnan wonders why The Kind One is so little changed since the glorious thing befell him, though what sort of transformation he expected I cannot guess; something in the way of a fancy tie or waistcoat, perhaps. In the experience of Cairnan, Cupid appears as somewhat of a blusterer, no doubt, and to him the winning of a woman was generally connected with a fight or two. The subtlety of feeling without action is not easily understood by a man who has been accustomed to see fists used as arguments, and trouble drowned in beer. He could have comprehended, and sympathised with, The Kind One under the influence of love and drink, but the comfort to be drawn from pine-woods is a flight beyond the simple imaginings of Cairnan. The Kind One wears

Farewell

no obvious expression of triumph, no outward sign of rejoicing, and he smokes the same old pipe as formerly. No wonder Cairnan is puzzled, for it is only those who watch and know him well who can detect the change wrought in him by love.

Miss Moreland calls herself a fairy god-mother, but still remains practical in the ordinary affairs of life, which is fortunate for her school, as Mary McKie can think of nothing else except weddings and joy-bells. She sings uncouth ditties in the kitchen, rattling her pots and pans the while, till a tramp appears for the usual dole of soup, when she calms her own feelings by soundly rating him. All the women folk smile upon The Kind One, and give him advice. He is very interesting to them, to Miss Moreland, Mary McKie and Cousin Ann. My Lady, who has done most for him, is now thrust into the background by the stronger-minded of

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her sex, and she is not in the least jealous. It is enough for her that everything has come right, and that the two persons most deeply concerned in these events have spoken to her from their hearts. She wants no more; more would embarrass her, and so she stands apart, satisfied with the knowledge that her romance has prospered.

As for me; these happenings have given me back Cynthia, on which account I feel glad with the rest of them, and can add my smile to those I see about me. Cynthia has returned to her old allegiance, and the pensive moods have given place to a refreshed activity, which has already left its mark upon her knees. The familiar scratches have returned; the bramble bushes seem to have sharpened their thorns in an interval of waiting, and the angles of Cynthia are not more rounded than they used to be, when she

Farewell

sits upon my chest. The Baa-lamb and The Beloved recognise their sister again; she was as a stranger for a time; but now she has fought them both, and they feel that she is of the family once more.

Love rings down the curtain on this little stage of mine, and the moment draws near when I shall bid you farewell. Perhaps we shall meet again; who knows? But with the triumph of Cupid a pause, at least, is clearly due. At Dornell the pleasant days succeed each other, just as they did before I wrote of them, and the seasons bring changing colours to the fields and garden. The charm of the whole remains unaltered throughout the year, and I remain, an idler irreclaimable, in the midst of a well-loved land. Little Cupid on the summer-house, is this a sort of love you understand? I think not, because there is no triumph in it for such as you. So thought The Kind One, once upon a time,

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but he—Little Cupid, I bow to you, only spare me torture when you shoot!

Even as I write, it is summer at Dornell. The trailing roses on the bank near Cairnan's yard are pink with blossom, and the placid workers scratch with wooden rakes about the lawns, as I scratch with a pen on paper, in tranquil mood, soothed by the touch of an old-world atmosphere. It matters not if these pages come from the smoke of a busy town, or are penned on the tossing highway of the sea. The breath of Dornell is in my nostrils, and my fancy makes a bridge to span the gulf of time or space between us. I have but to close my eyes to see the gracious sweep of lawn and fields toward the river, to see the burn slipping from the shades of Tempe, and to find anew those friends who made my dream-land human. Over the grassy slopes and flower-beds Little Cupid tilts a rounded chin, and in the

Farewell

light of sunset his nakedness is blushing.
Pink Cupid on a nut-brown thatch! Fare-
well, guardian of an empty summer-house!
I have written mockingly of you, small god-
ling, but, of a truth, I love you in my heart.
Some day, we may come to a better under-
standing, and meanwhile bear me no malice.

So fades Little Cupid in a rosy light,
and if he seem to you somewhat of an
insignificant deity, I would have you
remember that the theme of love has
drifted into my garden only by accident,
and that down among the lily-beds, and
on the broad green walk, there are but
Cynthia and The Baa-lamb running races
past the sun-dial. And what humour
prompted me to write about these things?
Just the humour that prompts one to stir
with the hand a bowl of dried rose-leaves.
The scent recalls the odour of past sum-
mers, and thus, among the flowers that are
as yet unwithered, I bid you adieu.

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